

umanahip  
light and  
-bordered  
n a wate  
to a little  
that you  
the hair;  
Let them  
whiting,  
becomes  
ngulshed  
e parous  
was Miss  
he body,  
rete bit,  
elow the  
id Gelle  
life now  
menial  
he skin  
surface  
to is  
voted to  
ould be  
outside  
subura  
runette,  
-blonde,  
man one  
man to  
roduced.  
tioman  
ne at all  
asional  
eaking,  
experi-  
easy to  
ability  
a com-  
ling, at  
may  
into the  
till the  
e-dust.  
ture of  
stance,  
on the  
elevari-  
ation,  
of the  
on the  
t, they  
ide it  
Europe  
y that

# LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1222.—VOL. XLVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 2, 1886.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["OH! FOR MERCY'S SAKE, DON'T! MISS HANKE," PEGGY BURST FORTH. "YOU ARE JUST THE LIVING IMAGE!"]

## DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

### CHAPTER I.

In the Central Provinces of India, more than a hundred miles from the nearest European station, there stands a large solitary bungalow that looks almost startlingly out of place amid the surrounding jungle.

It faces a wide and rapid river, now so shrunken by the scorching heat of the March sun that it has fallen from its usual noble proportions to a mere shallow stream, wending its feeble way through a vast expanse of yellow sand.

The other three sides of the house are encompassed by the real wild jungle—i.e., flat plains scored by dry water-courses, or covered with low shrub, and the horizon on all sides is bounded by low hills, or long belts of enormous masses of tropical forest trees.

By the magic glamour of an Eastern moon a fairy land seems spread before me—fairy

land, that has no charms for me. What though the greystone bungalow, with its deep verandahs, luxuriantly furnished rooms, stables full of high-caste Arab horses, gardens abounding with the rarest flowers and most delicious fruit, all call me mistress? I am discontented!

I am unutterably tired of them all, and why? Because this solitary grey abode has been my only home as long as I can remember.

Not another human habitation meets one's eyes, roam as they will over jungle and river bank. Not a sound breaks the silence, save the jingling of the bells of pack bullocks who are crossing a ford a little lower down.

This is the first time in my life that I have ventured to question fate! My attitude—mentally—is that of irritated interrogation, as I sit on the river bank with my chin in my hand, staring abstractedly at the stars reflected in the water.

A chance word dropped by my nurse Peggy has set my mercurial mind working in a totally new direction. My dormant curiosity has been roused, and I am longing to go forth

and see the great big world that lies beyond these vast solitary plains.

Perhaps not an unnatural desire on the part of a girl who has hitherto passed all her life in a desolate bungalow in Central India, with no other companions than her father and two old servants. Hitherto I have been sufficiently happy and contented, but to-night I sit staring down into the shallow "Kharran," the name of our river, asking the why and the wherefore of many things—and asking in vain.

Why do we live here alone, aloof from the haunts of men? Why do we never see a single white face?

As long as I can remember I have never seen one besides father's—and indeed his is burnt nearly black—and Peggy's and Tony's. Why are we thus cut off from all society? I have never ventured to put the question to father.

Father is a stern and inaccessible person, whom I both love and fear. Indeed, these questions, the offspring of many weary days of idleness, had never presented themselves before me until now.

Hitherto I have been contented with the present—now I wish to recall the past; but as I strain my eyes into distant years, I see no companions beyond those who are with me still.

I recollect my first pony—my struggle with the alphabet. I remember when Tony broke his arm, and when a cobra was killed in the verandah. Then a vista of long days of lessons, weary days spent over books and figures, rides at daybreak after jackals, camp life in tents, and stirring scenes out tiger-shooting.

These episodes bring me down to the present day.

Am I like other girls? I ask myself. Are other girls like me? How much I should like to see a young person of my own sex? I wonder if I belong to a common type?

As to appearance, what can I say for myself? I am slight and tall. I measure five feet five against the dining-room door; my face is pale and small, but then my eyes are large and very dark, my features are sharply cut. I wonder if I am pretty? One thing I am sure is pretty; that is my hair, and which, thanks to Peggy's having kept it closely cropped in my tender years is so abundant that it covers me like a mantle, and is of a light brown colour, considerably dashed with gold. Yes, I am really proud of my hair. As regards my education, it has been that of a boy. I have been well grounded in mathematics, have aroused the *pons asinorum*, and constructed the first two books of Virgil. I write a bold, masculine hand, am tolerably well read in history and the British Essayists. As for religious teaching, I believe I belong to the Church of England, but I have never been inside any place of public worship save a heathen temple. Peggy, who is a devout Catholic, repairs four times a year to the distant mission of Colar, and does ample penance for her sins in the eighty miles to and fro in a rough country bullock-cart.

Each morning father reads a chapter of the Bible. On Sundays he reads two chapters, morning prayers, and a sermon; and until quite lately he heard me my catechism as regularly as the Sabbath came round. So much for religious instruction.

Morally, I have been trained to abhor all manner of lying, cheating, treachery, and deceit, and that the next most heinous crime after actual falsehood was to be afraid of anything in earth, or sky, or sea. With regard to accomplishments, I am a respectable shot (but have feminine shrinking from living targets), a good horsewoman, accustomed to gallop over broken ground, clear nullahs and swim rivers. Besides these attainments I can play chess tolerably, and accompany myself (somewhat timidly) on the guitar.

On the other hand, let me confess my manifold shortcomings. I have never seen a piano, I have never written a letter, I have never heard of crewl work, the game of lawn tennis, a masher, or "the latest fashions." My usual costume consists of a white cotton dress, made after the pattern of Peggy's precious black silk, a dress that is as old as I am!—a plain skirt, gathered body, finished off with a black leather belt and wide sleeves. Having attempted to sketch myself, I will now do the same kind office for father. Are other men like him, I wonder?

He is elderly, tall, and spare, with a stern brown face, grizzly hair and beard, and very keen black eyes. The whole expression of his countenance is rather sad; but why he should look sad, I have never yet discovered, and may be, it is my imagination, and perhaps, I call things by wrong names, I have so little experience.

Father is very clever, very energetic, rather imperious, and I think, has a hot temper, which he endeavours to keep down. He is fond of shooting, of reading, and of me. As for his costume, it consists of breeches, long untanned boots with spurs, a loose grey linen coat bound round the waist, with a gay crimson scarf. Another scarf twisted into a

turban forms his sole and invariable head-dress. So much for his outward man!

During the hot season he and Tony (Peggy's husband) generally go for long shooting trips; they have now been absent six weeks, and Peggy and I have been left to our own devices. I have long ago come to the end of mine.

Doubtless this is the reason that time hangs so heavily on my hands. When father is at home we read, and ride, and boat; we garden, or play chess, but Peggy neither reads, rides, or boats. She says she has more than enough to do in looking after the house, and the servants, and me. I wish I could complain of being too busy!

There is no lack of money about our establishment; it is not poverty that has driven us forth into the wilderness. A large staff of well-trained native domestics wait upon us; our stables are full of horses; the extensive enclosure of land that surrounds the house is dotted with our cows, and flocks of our sheep and goats are pastured across the river.

About a mile further down its banks lay a native village, consisting of the usual square mud fort in the centre, with swarms of little mud-houses clustering round it, and a thick cactus hedge enclosing all.

From the marauding of wild beasts this village was called Paldi, and was thickly populated by men, women, and children; droves of brown goats and black, long-legged sheep, long-suffering ponies, and well-fed, pampered, sacred cows with silver bells round their necks.

Will it be believed that this remote, miserable, mud village was the nearest approach to a town that I had ever seen?

Latterly, my longing to behold other people had risen to such a height that I frequently walked to a hill overlooking Paldi, a hill which a huge scarlet idol, in a white shrine, shared with me; and there I have sat for an hour before sundown, and greedily gazed at the busy crowds that swarmed among the narrow streets (if streets they could be called) beneath my feet.

I have watched, with deep interest, files of women carrying water, boys running races, men gossiping in a circle, or playing games, girls chattering at the wells—everywhere I looked I saw life and action. I listened, and heard with envy the sounds of laughter, and the buzz of many tongues.

I was sure that I would gladly change places for a few hours with one of those girls by the well—one especially, whom I often recognised by her pretty face, her orange dress (or sarree), and massive gold ornaments. She was generally retelling some story, and surrounded by a crowd of laughing ecstatic listeners.

"How happy she must be!" was an expression that had escaped from me each time I saw her.

And thus I sat by the river's brink, that April night, wondering and wishing. Country carts had long ceased to tinkle through the shallow ford, the jackals were silent, the village tom-toms were at peace; there was not a sound to be heard save the occasional splash of a fish in the river beneath me; the stillness was oppressive, the air heavy with the scent of dying flowers.

Overcome by my surroundings, and the lateness of the hour, I leant my head against a stone and fell asleep. I undoubtedly slept, and then and there I dreamt a most delightful dream.

I dreamt that I was wide awake, and sitting down by the river's brink, the river being full, and that a splendid white and gold barge, crowded with gay people, came rowing by, all decked with flowers and flags, and having music on board. The barge stopped near me, and a plank was thrown out, and a young man came down it and approached, smiling, and holding out his hand.

"I have been searching for you all over the world," he said; "and I am so glad to have found you at last!"

I looked at him; he had, what seemed to

me, a beautiful face, like an engraving I had a fancy for in an old book of father's, called "Prince Rupert; or, the Cavaliers," only the cavaliers wore long curly hair, and this dream-man had his cropped close to his head; he had a moustache like the picture, a square forehead, a thin face, and very grave, earnest-looking eyes.

I went with him at once, without the smallest hesitation. The other people in the barge received me with great cordiality; the ladies kissed me, the men crowned me with flowers; then, all at once, I was in a great hall, lit up with coloured lights. Crowds of people surrounded me, all dressed in gay colours; all were dancing.

I was about to follow their example, the sound of music was in my ears, my partner's hand actually in mine, when I was recalled to realities by a rough shake, and a gruff voice saying,—

"It's a stroke of the moon you'll be getting! Come in at wance; it's all hours. Are you going to sit there all night, Miss Rancee? What in the world have you been dreaming about? Your eyes look quite dazed with the sleep."

"Oh! Peggy, I wish you had not disturbed me!" I replied, rising and yawning, and stretching out my arms. "I was dreaming such a lovely dream when you woke me. Oh, dear me! I wish I could go on with it!"

"Dreaming about what?"

"About such a nice young man! I was just going to dance with him!"

"Young man!—and dancing, indeed! What put the likes of such rubbish into your empty head? Go in, now, like a good girl, and don't talk rubbish!"

"It's a shame to go in this lovely night! Let me stay out here and dream—do, like a good Peggy!"

"Dream!—you and your dreams! You are as bad as me old grandmother, that was always dreaming and putting meanings to them!"

"Did she really? Now, I wonder what it means to dream of music and dancing?"

"Trouble of some kind," said Peggy, promptly.

"Oh!" rather abashed. "And to dream of a young man, very handsome, with—!"

"To dream of any young man is bad luck," interrupted Peggy, remorselessly; "and handsome makes it ten times worse! A handsome face works misfortune—sure everyone knows that!"

"I believe you are making it all up," I replied, with a confidence I was far from feeling. "Peggy, you only say it to vex me—so now I'll say something to vex you. Listen. I want to see the world!"

"Is it the world!" driving me before her as she spoke. "Then you want to see a wicked, bad place, and you are best where you are!"

"Why so Peggy?" I inquired, incredulously.

"Oh! raisons enough!"

"But tell me one reason—do, dear Peggy!" hanging on her arm, and speaking in my most coaxing voice, which I rarely knew to fail with her.

"I'll tell you nothing!" rudely shaking me off. "I can't for the life of me tell what has put these queer, flighty notions into your head—and you, that used to be as content as a mouse in a meal chest!"

"And now I feel a great deal more like a mouse in a trap! I'm tired of the Jungle!" I answered, irritably.

"Oh, Miss Rancee!" cried Peggy, in a tone of pious horror. "Goodness forgive you for saying anything so wicked!"

"Yes," again seizing her arm; "I'm the mouse, and you are the old cat that watches me. Some day—perhaps when the cat's away—the mouse will play. How will you like that?"

"Now, Miss Rancee, get out with your jokes, and your cats, and your mice; this is no time to be standing talking balderdash—going on for eleven o'clock. Come away off to your bed, now!"



## CHAPTER II.

The following day was long—endlessly long—and oppressively hot. Towards afternoon I was driven by mosquitos from the dining-room to the drawing-room, from the drawing-room to the long verandah facing the river—which was furnished with matting, tables, and cane chairs, and formed an informal, but favourite sitting-room.

Here I enjoyed comparative peace. I ceased battling with hateful insects, who were thirsting for my blood, and sat with my hands locked behind my head, gazing out on the but too familiar scene.

The sunken river bed, the hard-baked ground and withered yellow grass, the drooping trees half-bare of leaves, with long dried seed-pods scattered beneath them, the rows of crows, sparrows, minars, and other birds chattering along the verandah, their beaks boldly agape with heat; even the quarrelsome sparrow was silent for a wonder.

I note all this as I have noted it a hundred times before, and then I yawn widely and wish I had something to do. There lies my book staring me in the face—Buckle's "History of Civilization"—a task father has laid upon me in his absence—ugh!

Buckle is to me as dry as the bed of the Kharran river that lies before my eyes. It is too hot to read, too hot to stum the light guitar. What am I to do?

At last I decide to hunt up Peggy and talk to her, as I have never found it any exertion to use my tongue. I rise accordingly, and seek her in vain in her usual haunts, her own menzium—in her special den where she sometimes cooks dainty little cakes and dishes; mends, makes, lectures the servants, and occasionally takes a nap.

I find her at last in the store-room, an apartment dedicated to the storage of wine cases, tins of kerosine oil, old newspapers, old bones, old boots—a place that has never had the smallest interest or attraction for me.

I push the door ajar, then I throw it wide open, and see a sight that fills me with amazement.

I behold Peggy on her knees, with her back turned to me, busily engaged in emptying a large trunk. Spread all around her on the floor are piles of the most rich and gorgeous apparel. I see silks and satins, velvets, ribbons, laces, gold and silver, blue and scarlet and pink.

I see something the colour of the sky, with silver stars; something scarlet, with a wide gold border of rich embroidery.

In short, I see dress for the first time in my life, and with a bound I am in the midst of all these treasures.

"See, now! I wish to goodness, Miss Rancee, you would not be coming in here. Can't you go out and amuse yourself," cried Peggy, irritably, as she spread her arms over the open box, as if she feared that I would make a raid on its contents there and then.

I had not the smallest intention of complying with this broad hint. Firstly, because, as you know, I am tired of my own company; secondly, because I see the means of ample amusement round me; thirdly, because I am convinced that Peggy has some private and mysterious reason for wishing to get rid of me; and the last conviction, alone, is amply sufficient to obtain me to the spot.

"Do ye hear me, honey? I don't want ye!" "Yes, you do, Peg; you know very well you always want me, so don't say what you don't mean!"

"Well, anyway, not just now! I'm terribly busy. I've a lot of things to redd up. Can't ye go out. Ye have not been beyond the place this two days. The house will grow on ye, and there's your grey Arab just leppin out of his skin for want of exercise."

"Let him lepp!" I return, contemptuously. "It's too hot to ride till after six o'clock this broiling day!"

"Well," continued Peggy, concealing the glories of various things from my eager eyes,

"ye might go off and play with the panther, or the two little bears, like a good girl!"

"I'm tired of the two little bears! Look at my arms with their scratches. They are getting very cross, and I think now they can take care of themselves! I'll have them turned loose in the jungle to get their own living!"

"Turned loose! I'd sooner drown them with my own two hands; they'd be always prowling round. Well, and what are you waiting for?"

"To help you to unpack, to be sure!" now plunging my arms into the trunk. "I never, never saw such lovely things! Where did they come from, and when?"

I never doubted that this trunk full of beautiful articles had been despatched by father, and was intended as a "surprise" for me—a surprise like my watch and new saddle—which I had in this case somewhat anticipated.

Snatching up a crimson cloak with deep embroidered border I wrapped it round my shoulders; unfurled a large feather fan, and commenced to promenade the room in what I fancied was the true fine lady fashion, smiling and nodding coquettishly from time to time at Peggy, who still knelt on the floor with her hands on her hips, her mouth half open, but speechless.

"How do I look, Peg?" I asked, impressively.

"Oh! for mercy sake, don't, Miss Rancee!" she burst forth at last. "You are just the living image!" covering her face with her hands.

Then as I stood and gazed at her in blank dismay, she raised herself up, and said in a husky voice,—

"Throw them off! Take them off! Core of my heart, take them off when I tell ye."

"What do you mean?" I inquired, awestruck by her unusual manner and the vehemence of her gestures, and rather frightened by this passionate outburst. "Are these things not new? Are they not for me?"

"No."

"When did they come?" I asked in a faltering tone.

"They came in or about fifteen years ago, when we came."

"Then they were my mother's," I exclaimed, and for some reason that I could not account for, I began to slowly divest myself of the opera cloak and fold it up.

"They were. Many's the time I put that same wrap on her shoulders when she was going out to a ball."

"Was she fond of dancing?" I inquired.

"She was main fond, and an elegant dancer, as light as a feather on the floor. Ah, dear me!"

"Peggy," I said suddenly, sitting down on a box near her, "tell me some more about my mother. I know so little beyond the fact that she died when I was a baby."

"Now, Miss Rancee, honey! What can I tell you but what you know. The master will tell you more nor I can. You can talk to him if you choose."

"He never speaks of her. Are people not spoken of just because they are dead? If I were to die would you never speak of me?"

"It depends!" turning away and commencing to unfold and shake out a dress. "I suppose you don't remember her?"

"Not—not the least little bit. I wish I could."

"Well, you wor only a year old when you lost her. Your poor little brother was going on for three. He would mind her if he had lived."

"How I wish he had. How nice it would have been for me! What was my brother like, Peg?"

"Tall and fair and smiling. Just beautiful!"

"And was father fond of her? Was he in a great grief?"

"He was just like a madman, no more and no less."

"How I wish I could remember her, even one little tiny thing about her. Is there no picture of her?"

"Not wan, except yourself!" "Oh! am I the picture of her. Then as you say she was just beautiful, am I beautiful too? Do tell me, Peggy."

"Well," greatly confused, "there does be likenesses. There may be a terrible resemblance between two people, and one ugly and tother handsome. Now there's me and me sister Catherine—she was a fine-looking slip of a girl, with a nice clear skin, and I was always as yer see me (and that was very plain)—as black as a crow. Yet anyone would know ne for sisters. It's the same with you."

"Only I'm not as black as a crow, Peg!" I answered sharply. "Why have I never seen this box before?"

"Because it was pushed away behind other things, and more betoken ye have no call to see it at all. Your father would be mad if he knew you laid an eye on the things."

"And why?"

"Oh! he would think they might be putting notions of dress and finery into your head. I'm just raking through them to see if there's anything quiet would do to cut up for you, for you are getting past them cottons, and I want the masher to bring home to himself that you are growing up."

"Do you think we shall always live here, Peg? Shall we never—never—never—go away?"

"Faix, I don't know. I hope we will. I'd be sorry to think I would never see the native land agin, nor taste a Dublin Bay herring, and lay me old bones in Glasnevin! I've often made out to ask the masher stoutly, and when it comes to the point, and I look in his eyes, the heart fails me. He is a terrible stern man, and he has queer notions."

"About what?"

"Well, about you for wan! He thinks to bring you up above the world, like a spring on the top of the mountain, where there's nothing to poison you, and nothing whatever between you and Heaven! But as I say to Tony, if a girl's to be married, she will be married if she was tied in a sack, and chained in a dungeon at the bottom of the sea."

"Yes, but I don't want to be married! I only want to go out, and to see the world. I am sick of this lonely bungalow."

"Oh, ye are far better where ye are. The world is a bad, wicked place; and, you believe me, that is a true word I'm saying."

"That's all very fine for you to say, Peg. You've had your day; now I want to have mine."

"And shure and aren't you having a beautiful wan? Not a care or a want to trouble you; a fine house, and grand gardens, and horses galore, and dozens of servants to wait on you hand and foot, and your father just crazy about you, and me, that would give my heart's blood for you—what more do you want?"

From this point of view it seemed impossible, and not only impossible, but abominably ungrateful, to ask for more, and I was silent; and Peggy, to change the conversation, suddenly shook out a voluminous pink satin garment, with lace flounces, and exclaimed, "See that, now!"

"What is it, Peg?" I inquired, eagerly.

"Why, a ball dress, and what else?"

"How lovely! But where is the body? What! that little thing, with no sleeves. Do people really—"

"To be sure they do," she interrupted. "Shure, no one goes to a ball in a high body."

"Well, I never knew that before. How nice and cool it must be! It is a lovely, lovely dress!" surveying it with grave admiration.

Hitherto Peggy's somewhat rusty black silk had been the finest gown I had ever seen; but this gorgeous garment was a revelation to me.

It did not signify that it was nearly twenty years behind the fashion, for I was as ignorant that there was such a thing as fashion as my

grey Arab horse, who wore the same coat all the year round.

After the pink came a somewhat yellow satin, that had once been white; then fans, mantles, lace shawls, gold bracelets, and satin slippers. I gazed over each separate article with the zest of a girl who is awake, for the first time in her life, to the existence of female finery.

"What pretty little shoes!" I cried. "I wonder if they would fit me?"

Peggy took no notice, but went on folding up, putting by one thing after another. Nothing quiet, nothing capable of "cutting up" for me, had been forthcoming.

I sat down on a box, and tried on the slippers. They fitted me beautifully! Never had I seen my feet look to such advantage!

"May I keep them, Peg?—not to wear—never to wear—but just because they were my mother's? It's very hard if I may not have something of hers—even this little old pair of shoes."

For all answer Peggy reached over, stripped them, one after another, off my reluctant feet, put them in on the top of the box, closed it, looked it, and finally sat down on the lid, as if exhausted with her labours.

"That's too bad of you, Peggy!" I exclaimed, nearly crying; "why may I not have the little shoes?"

"I dare not give them, nor lay a finger on one of these things. Your father is that jealous of them, no one is to touch them, or look at them."

"And yet you were going to take a dress out of it for me!" I retorted, sharply.

"Something he would never have missed; but he'd know the slippers," returned Peggy, readily. "She had a foot like—"

then she pulled herself up sharp, and a knock coming to the door, she went over and opened it, and held a long parley with our big, white-turbaned butler.

Meanwhile my eyes had caught sight of an article she had overlooked—a small, red morocco writing case—lying on the floor. I pounced on it at once.

"Look here! See what you have forgotten!" holding it up. "Now Peg, dear Peg!" throwing my arms round her neck, "surely I may keep this, may I not? Where can be the harm?"

Peg never could withstand my caresses; and, between them, and a disinclination to reopen the box, she gave in, but with anything but a good grace.

"Since you are so set, I suppose you may have it. Show" turning over the leaves; "it's empty. Well, take it; but, mind you, if your father ever lays an eye on it he will just put me outside the door—and that's truth I'm telling you."

"Very well, he shall never see it," I returned, emphatically.

And with a glow of satisfaction at having carried my point, and, at the same time a guilty sense of also carrying my first secret, I took myself off along with the red blotter, in order that I might examine it quite at my leisure in the privacy of my own chamber.

### CHAPTER III.

Once by myself, I inspected my treasure far more thoroughly than I had done under Peggy's sharp eyes. I hoped I might discover some little scrap of my mother's writing—something that would bring me nearer to her than I had yet arrived at.

In my secret heart I adored passionately the memory of my young mother—(she was quite a girl, Peggy said)—whom I had never seen. Oh! that I could recall her face, however dimly! But, alas! the past, so far as it concerned her, was a blank.

Reverently, as if it were a most sacred relic, I examined the leaves of the red case, then its two side pockets; out of one I drew several blank sheets of delicately-scented note-paper, of a pink tint, also a gilt printed card,

which puzzled me for a very long time. I made out at length that it was a list of names—at a ball. People's names were scribbled opposite the dances—there were twenty dances in all. My mother had danced *every one*! No wonder Peg said she was fond of dancing!

I pored over this little souvenir for fully an hour. I studied every twist, every line of pencil mark.

I made out that my mother had danced three times with someone of the name of Ellis, once with most others, and four times with an initial L. The date of the dance was June 20th, nearly seventeen years previously, when I was but a baby.

I wondered if I had been brought to look at her in all her finery, ere she departed for the ball. I wondered if she came and kissed me in my cot, before she started. Then I went to the looking-glass and stared at myself for a long time, and repeated to myself Peggy's speech of that afternoon, "Her very picture." Only, of course, her face was not as white as mine, for mine was almost colourless, owing to my having spent my life on the plains.

As I was thus engaged in minutely examining my features Peggy walked in, paused in the doorway, and exclaimed, angrily,—

"And it's there you are, figuring before the looking-glass! And did I ever see the likes of such conceals!—such wicked conceals! So much for letting you get the taste of dress and vanity! I knew how it would be!"

"It's not 'conceals,' as you call it. I don't really admire myself one bit," I retorted, indignantly; "and it's nonsense to fancy that looking at a pink satin dress would make me what you call wicked all at once! I am not quite an idiot!"

"And, then, what are you up to?"

"I wanted, by looking at my own face, to try and see if I could imagine what my mother was like."

"Was like! Oh, there, did I ever ever hear of such foolishness! Well, there's your horse waiting and tearing about; Laloo can hardly hold him, so make haste, or he won't leave an ounce of gravel on the sweep. Come, here is your habit!"

Thus adjured, I hurried into my habit—a white one—and, before long, was taking my usual solitary gallop across the surrounding plains.

A few days after this conversation, father returned in an unusually cheerful humour, and laden with spoil. His bag consisted of four tigers, a leopard, two bison, no end of black bucks' heads, and similar small deer too numerous to mention.

Certainly men make a wonderful difference in a house; and father and Tony, with their tramping-boots and loud voices, were a welcome change to the stillness and repose of the bungalow, with only Peggy and I for its tenants, and our decorous tribe of cat-footed servants.

Father had been absent for two months, and had a considerable accumulation of newspapers and one or two letters awaiting his perusal. Once a fortnight a running postman passed our way.

After dinner, father busied himself in an old copy of the *Times*, and I vainly tried to absorb a few pages of Buckle—vainly, indeed. My yawns were not merely loud, but infectious; and, much to my delight, I was desired to get out the chess-board, which request I obeyed with the greatest alacrity.

As I paused and meditated over the moves, I was conscious that father's eyes were now and then rivetted on me with unusual keenness. Once I met their glance point-blank, and he was surprised into saying,—

"Yes, I am looking at you in wonder, Rance! Living with you day after day I saw no change in you; you still seemed to be a little girl; now a short absence has opened my eyes. I see that you are grown up! How old are you?"

"I shall be eighteen next birthday."

"Eighteen!" he echoed in amazement.

"Yes; I was seventeen two months ago," I replied proudly.

"And are still sweet seventeen? You won't be so anxious to put the clock on a few years hence. We must celebrate your birthday—your arrival at years of discretion, or indiscretion—in some fashion. What would you like to do? Shall we go out into tents for a week?"

What I would have liked to do would have been to go down to Bombay for a trip, but I had not the courage to say so. I wanted so much to see many things that were only names to me.

At last I blurted out,—

"Next time Peggy goes to Colar I should like to go with her."

"For what?" inquired my father, very sternly.

"To see it—to see the world," I faltered, tearfully. "There is a railway-station, a chapel, and a shop!"

"The station is a shed, the chapel is a barn, the shop a musty store, reeking with bad brandy, kerosine oil, and stale cheese. Much better go out in tents and study nature!"

"But I am so sick of studying nature. I know it all so well—parched plains, dry rivers, leafless trees in the hot weather; green plains, splendid foliage, and torrents in the rains."

"Anything is better than that hole, Colar!"

"Still I should like to see it. I feel so ignorant of common things," I grumbled on, bravely.

"You are an unusually well-educated girl. You are a fair Latin scholar, well read in English classics, and no contemptible mathematician!"

"But I have never seen a ship, or a train, or a mountain, or the sea! I want to see the world!" I concluded, with my usual parrot cry.

"You won't see much of it at Colar! Anyway, the world, as you call it, is a bad place; the less you mix in it the better! I have lived in it for thirty years, and I found at the end of that time that all was vanity! Friendship is nought, love is nought, fame is nought; but what is the use of talking to you? You, like all the innocent and young, think it will be different for you—your path will surely be strewn with roses, if I will only open the cage door and let you fly away!"

"Oh, father, it has not come to that! I am not a prisoner! If I did fly away I would come back!"

"You cannot believe it now, but you are happiest here; and, believe me, in days to come, you will look back on your present existence as a thirsty traveller in a scorching desert thinks of the cool oasis he has rashly quitted. Here, if you are ignorant of conventionality, you are otherwise well informed! Your mind is as pure as a piece of crystal! If you have no friends you have no enemies! If you have no society you have no slander! If you have no lovers you have no tears!"

"Lovers!" becoming very hot, "oh! father, I never thought of them; I don't want any lovers. I only want to see the world."

"You have a comfortable home," he continued, "books, horses, pets, and flowers. You lead a rational, healthy existence—but there, I will say no more. Had I the eloquence of Burke, I could not convince you. Your young nature, eager to enjoy, full of hope and life, is too strong for my old, broken-down, battered experience. After all, it was only what I expected. I knew you would look for a change, and I awaited the day; but I never expected it would have come upon me so soon."

As he concluded, his voice shook with emotion, his eyes looked quite misty, and my heart smote me; and I exclaimed, impulsively,—

"It is only when you are away that I am so lonely, and the days are so dreary and long. When you are at home, father, I want nothing but you."

"Is that really true? But I need not ask



You have never learned to make pretty, empty speeches, thank goodness. I believe you mean what you say."

"Yes, it is quite true."

"Well, then, my child, let us have no more folly about wanting 'to see the world.' Your world is under this roof."

To this decree I acquiesced without a murmur, and my obedience had its due and unexpected reward; but, indeed, when father was with me, and we resumed our excursions on the river, our rides, our shooting-matches, and games of chess, my wish to roam died away with an imperceptible yearning.

A few evenings after this conversation father came into the room, carrying a sandal-wood box in one hand and a candle in the other.

"Open this," he said, holding out the former, "and tell me what you think of its contents."

I opened it promptly, still standing by the table, on which was placed a large lamp, and took out a long roll of chamois leather that fitted it tightly.

Next unrolled this, and then came cotton wool. I raised the cotton wool, and gave an involuntary scream. Large bright things, like drops of water strung together, lay before me. They flashed in the light like fire.

Never, never had I seen or dreamt of anything like what lay beneath my dazzled eyes. A thick necklace, with heavy pendants, all made of these bright stones!

"What are they?" I asked, almost in a whisper.

"They are diamonds—diamonds of the first water."

"And for me?"

"Yes; they are not much use to you except to look at, but they are very valuable. I believe they are worth fifteen thousand pounds. There is probably not such a necklace in Europe."

"And where did you get it?"

"It was given to me by a native prince. You see," spreading it out, "it is quite an Eastern design. This thick mass of brilliants, three deep for the throatlet, and then the large pendants with the big stones—an English jeweller would have got the same effect with half the material and half the expense."

"But surely not such a blaze of light?" I cried, holding up the heavy necklace, which sparkled and flashed till it made my eyes blink.

"Put it on," said my father, taking it and clasping it round my neck, and then surveying me critically.

"How do I look?" I cried, involuntarily.

"Oh, as to that, everyone looks well in diamonds, including, no doubt, the dusky-skinned lady for whom this ornament was originally made," he returned, coolly.

"And how did you come by it?" I inquired, curiously.

A strange expression passed over his face, and for a moment he made no reply. Then he said, with a short laugh,—

"Do you think I got it by bribery and corruption? No! Do you think I stole it? I was a doctor long ago!"

"You, papa!"

"Yes, a civil doctor, in very large practice. I frequently attended native noblemen, who gave enormous fees—certainly not like this, though," touching my necklace. "The Rajah of Odore, a Croesus, had but one son. I performed a very difficult operation on him, and, under Providence, I saved his life. His father, in his gratitude, insisted on giving me this bauble—forced it on me, saying, 'Did I think he could ever repay me.' His wife was dead. He had no call for jewels. He was rich, and he did not value his son's life at less than these few bright stones. He was so determined that I should take them that he said if I did not he would throw them into the Ganges there and then. So I accepted them, and when I had accepted his magnificent gift, and thanked him, he said,—

"Do not thank me. I am glad to be rid

of it thus honourably. It has ever been an unlucky necklace. May it, however, bring you nothing but good fortune!"

"An unlucky necklace! What did he mean?"

"I had the curiosity to inquire, and he told me. It is of immense antiquity, and was originally discovered when workmen were making excavations or alterations in one of the courts of the zenana of an old palace. Tradition said that a former Nawab used to practise the most hideous cruelties, common enough long ago among Eastern despots—that one, or more, of the ladies of his harem had been bricked up alive. Skeletons and jewels were discovered, and among the jewels this necklace!"

"That I have on now!" I nearly shrieked, trying to unclasp it. "And some miserable wretch wore it when she was murdered in that barbarous way!"

"It is only an Indian legend, and you know what they are worth! Surely, Rancee, you are not superstitious? All precious stones have their history!"

"What else did you hear?" I inquired, evasively.

"That it belonged to one of the Begums of Oude in the days of Warren Hastings. She was implicated in the rebellion of Cheit Singh. She was imprisoned by the Nawab Vizier and plundered of it, and all her other treasures, after which it passed through many hands till it came to be a part of the loot of Delhi. A drunken soldier found it, and taking it for glass sold it for a few rupees to a native jeweller, who subsequently disposed of it to my Rajah, who doubtless got it cheap. He said the central stone of the pendant was all but matchless, but it has a rather uncanny name. It is called 'The Evil Eye!'" concluded father, with a laugh.

"I'm not sure that I like this necklace. I feel quite afraid of it," I remarked, rather nervously.

"Pooh, don't be childish, and don't talk nonsense. Go away and look at yourself in the glass, and come back here again, and then let me hear if you are afraid of it?"

I went to my room, lit two candles, and surveyed myself exhaustively. My neck and throat looked one blaze of diamonds. I could not take my eyes off my own reflection. Afraid of the necklace, no! I had never seen anything so splendid in all my life; and Begums, walled-up wives, were swept out of my mind by the vision of blinding brilliancy. My neck seemed encircled by a band of light.

"So you are there at the glass again!" said a voice behind me that made me jump, and turning, I beheld Peggy. "Oh, my gracious!" she ejaculated, "and has he given you that—the grand diamond necklace! Well, well, well! Has he given it to you?"

"He has."

"It's splendid, but not much use to you here, forbye looking at it—However, it's worth a mint of money. You must take great care of it. I'll lock it away for you in the big safe, and don't be letting any of the servants see it, whatever you do."

"Why not, Peg?"

"Oh! them grand stones is a great temptation. Sure, if they were only to pick out one and make off with it, they are rise for life! And what did you do to deserve it, honey? How did you earn such a present?"

"I think, but I am not sure, that father gave it to me because I have promised to be content here, and not to think of other places or people."

"In short, to be easy here, and stop craving and clamouring to see the world! Well, all I can say is, that he goes a queer way about making you content with the jungle when he goes and gives you a diamond necklace, and you may tell him so if you like."

"Indeed, Peg, I shall do nothing of the kind! Is it not beautiful?" turning and twisting my neck in order to see the stones glisten and flash. "Look at the drops! Now

they look white and silver and then deep red. It's almost like the sun. It's splendid."

"Splendid enough! but it has a rare bad name, so I mind hearing. If I were you I'd wear it but little. The natives says a heap of queer things about it."

"I'm surprised, Peg, that you would mind what poor ignorant heathen people say among themselves," now taking up the cudgels in behalf of my most magnificent adornment.

"Oh, well! I don't believe all they say, and faix I would be very sorry to believe a quarter they say about the Begum's necklace. They say it has a bad sperrit about it, and that it has the Evil Eye!—but eye or no eye, don't you be wearing it constant, unless you want to have us all murdered in our beds. You can see the flash of them diamonds half a mile off!" and with this parting caution, Peg stalked out of the room, and did not forget to slam the door after her.

Peg disapproved of the necklace, that was evident, and Peg was superstitious. The more I looked at it the more I was enamoured of it. I could hardly bear to take it off. In the end I folded it up in its chamois leather covering, and put it under my pillow and slept on it, and dreamt of Begums and palaces, and of wearing my diamonds in the presence of thousands of spectators, who shouted and clapped their hands, and shrieked out that I was an Indian princess, and that I had the Evil Eye!

(To be continued.)

## HIS QUAKER BRIDE.

—O:—

### CHAPTER VI.

BOILING over with indignation, Val Curzon went straight away to Algy Cavendish's rooms, and acquainted him with all that had taken place that morning in Verney-street.

"I love the girl," he wound up by saying. "Yet I shall never get her unless I can prove that Quaker fellow's story to be a pure fabrication!"

"Something evolved from his own inner consciousness," said Algy, musingly. "It's awkward that you should have been in Paris, though, at the time mentioned."

"Why awkward? Confound it, Algy, are you going over to join the Opposition?"

"Don't be absurd, my dear boy. It's much too hot to lose one's temper comfortably. The case, as stated by you, amounts to this: Broadbrim accuses you of being identical with an amorous swindler who actually lived under the same roof with him for awhile. You indignantly deny the charge, and—very foolishly—knock Broadbrim down. The next thing is to prove your innocence and exact an ample apology. Now, can you tell me if your accuser is acting honestly according to his lights, or only playing a part?"

"I believe the fellow really takes me for a swindler, and that no one would be more surprised than himself to find he had made a mistake," said Val. "He was down upon me directly we met. Malice is out of the question. He was not aware of my liking for Ruth Inglefield until our battle had taken place. My little girl acted splendidly! She avowed her belief in me before them all!"

"Then if Broadbrim's story is genuine, as far as it goes, it must be a case of mistaken identity," continued Algy, "and it won't require much clearing up. Write to the proprietor of the hotel where you stayed, and get him to prove that you were actually there at the time when Broadbrim avows you hung out in close vicinity to himself. That ought to satisfy Miss Hargrave, surely! If you like I will call on her, and explain that such a charge, taken in connection with you, is simply absurd. A woman who knew more of the world would not have entertained it for a moment."

"Thanks, old man, I should be awfully grateful," exclaimed Val. "She'd very likely listen to you, whereas I am in her black books, thanks to Mr. Barclay and my boldness in making love to Ruth. I am forbidden to cross the Verney-street threshold again. You'll have to go soon, for they're off to-morrow."

"This afternoon will do," said Algy, caressing his small, fair moustache. "I say, though!" he continued with an amused smile, "what an important individual I am becoming, a sort of amiable go-between. Yours is not the only delicate business I have in hand, Curzon. Miss Fitz-Markham has commissioned me to find out all I can with regard to the charming Mrs. Whycherley's antecedents. She wants to prevent a marriage between her father and that too-attractive widow."

"And have you discovered anything?"

"I've got a clue," said Algy, "which may lead to rather a striking *dénouement* later on. At present prudence warns me to keep my own counsel. If the very walls have ears, why widows, don't you know—"

"Of course, you've only to refer to Mr. Weller, senior, to ascertain what they are capable of. You'll do what you can to help me in the Verney-street affair, Algy? It's the enormity of the charge and their belief in it that renders the thing serious."

"I shall represent myself as your guide, philosopher and friend, one who has known you from childhood upwards, and so on," said Algy lazily. "I shall express my firm belief in your shining virtues, your inability to do anything worse than leave your tailor's bill unpaid. The hotel proprietor's letter will do the rest. You will be received back with open arms, and Broadbrim will be simply nowhere."

"If you can manage to say a word to Ruth—"

"Don't ask too much of me. I am but human. Once left alone with the lovely Quakeress I should forget you, and go in on my own account."

In that case," said Val, laughingly, "I should have to console myself with the fair Aurelia. I feel all the better for our talk, Algy. I was almost off my balance when I came in just now."

"You looked as if you were thirsting for Broadbrim's blood!" murmured Algy. "There was a gleam in your eye suggestive of insanity."

"The fit is passing off, I shan't need a strait-waistcoat this time," said Val Curzon, as he rose to go. "By-bye, old man. Do the best you can for me, like the good fellow you are."

"Ta-ta!"

With these infantine, but fashionable salutations, the young men parted—Val Curzon going home somewhat relieved in mind, now that his cause was in Algy's hands.

Such a mad, unfounded charge must fall to the ground, he told himself confidently. Once let him get reinstated in Aunt Rachael's good graces, and it would be an easy matter to win Ruth.

How staunch and true and fearless the girl he loved had proved! It sent a little glow of pleasure through Val to recall her indignant look, and loving, trustful words. They almost reconciled him to Ephraim Barclay's annoying accusation, since but for that they would not have been called forth.

Algy Cavendish did not make Verney-street the scene of his first visit that afternoon. He was due at the Fitz-Markham's house in Eaton-square, and he valued Aurelia's good opinion too much to annoy her by failing to put in an appearance when expected.

Colonel Fitz-Markham was the sole occupant of the drawing-room when the tall footman ushered Algy in.

As the little man entered, the Colonel hastily thrust a note he had been reading into his breast-pocket.

"Oh! how dye do, Cavendish?" he said, in his pleasant, boyish way, shaking hands with

Algy. "Thomas, ask your mistress to come down. Aurelia is connected with no end of societies you know, and they are always holding meetings," he continued, in rueful explanation. "She has only just returned from one of those meetings, and gone upstairs to take her things off."

"Miss Fitz-Markham is destined to occupy a prominent position among highly-educated public-spirited ladies," said Algy, admiringly.

The Colonel stroked the long grey whiskers, and looked dubious.

"Ah, ye-es, I suppose so," he replied, hesitatingly. Fact is, Cavendish, a woman may be too strong-minded. She goes in for abstruse subjects, till she loses all sympathy with other women who are content to remain simply charming and gracefully domesticated, without troubling themselves about Greek and mathematics. Adorable women I call them, but Aurelia regards them with scorn."

This compliment, evidently intended for the absent Mrs. Whycherley, was almost too much for Algy's gravity.

He murmured something about various types of womanhood, each charming in its own peculiar style.

"Yes, exactly," acquiesced the Colonel, "And some day Aurelia will recognise this, at least I hope so. Marriage would, I am sure, tone down some of her very pronounced opinions. It had that effect in my case, anyhow."

"Miss Fitz-Markham does not, I believe, approve of marriage?"

"Oh! but you know she can't always adhere to that line," said the Colonel earnestly. "She will have a good dowry, and sooner or later she must meet with some poor de—, I mean some suitable partner, and make up her mind to marry him. He need not be very rich, since she has plenty of money. What a wife Aurelia would make, especially for a young and rising man!"

"But the loss to yourself!" reminded Algy, mischievously, wondering what on earth Aurelia would think or say could she but overhear herself being metaphorically thrown at his head by the affectionate Colonel.

"Of course, of course, I should miss her certainly, in more ways than one, but if her happiness were in question—Ah! there is Aurelia!"

The tall, pretty, clever girl accorded Algy an unusually cordial greeting.

Her speech at the meeting had been well received; it had elicited frequent cheers, it was to appear in the daily papers. Hence she was in a good mood, inclined to be civil even to that arch-enemy, man.

"What a gift is eloquence!" said Algy humbly. "I couldn't make a speech if my life depended upon it."

"That is not true," said Aurelia promptly, "You can speak well in public, Mr. Cavendish. I heard your voice frantically calling for more chairs in the middle aisle the last time I went to St. Aloysius' on a festival day, and it sounded quite pathetic."

"That is the way in which she turns upon everyone who offers her a compliment," interposed the Colonel, casting wistful glances in the direction of the door. "I—I am afraid I must leave you now. I have an engagement for five o'clock."

As he spoke he drew out his handkerchief, and a little perfumed note, addressed in a delicate Italian hand, fell to the ground.

Before the Colonel—blushing like a boy detected in his first love affair—could pick it up, the lynx-eyed Aurelia had possessed herself of the note. After a momentary glance at its contents she restored it to its owner, regarding him, meanwhile, with a stern ominous expression upon her pretty piquant face.

"I think you must postpone your engagement, papa," she said, in a tone that made the gallant old warrior shake in his shoes. Small wonder that he wished to be emancipated from such stern, but wholesome control. "You forget Lady Smythe's 'At Home.' She will be offended if we are not there."

"But really, Aurelia—"

"Lady Smythe will take no denial, papa, accept no excuses. We are bound to go, and her 'At Homes' are delightful! One never meets any doubtful people there—in itself a great recommendation."

"Well, well, we'll see!" muttered the Colonel, resuming his seat. Aurelia took Algy Cavendish into the conservatory to admire a new orchid. While there they heard the street door bang violently; when they went back to the drawing-room it was empty.

"He's gone!" said Aurelia, her voice full of calm resignation to the inevitable. "What do you think Mr. Cavendish? That note was from Mrs. Whycherley, telling him that she would be at Lady Mandeville's garden-party this afternoon, and papa has gone there to meet her. We received invitations, only I would not go because I felt certain that horrid woman would be there. Is it not too annoying? She seems to exercise a spell over papa. His liking for the governess and the young shop-person did not give me half the trouble that she has occasioned."

"They were not widows!" said Algy, smiling under his moustache; "but there are means by which even widows may be vanquished."

"How? Have you ascertained anything dreadful about Mrs. Whycherley?" asked Aurelia, breathlessly.

"I am feeling my way towards an important fact that may prove a stumbling-block in the way of her matrimonial designs upon the Colonel. At present I am not sufficiently advanced in my researches to say any more."

"Men are so slow and deliberate in all they do!" exclaimed Aurelia, impatiently.

"But if they succeed in the end?"

"They don't always. However, it is very good of you to try, and I must not be ungrateful. If I can only save papa from Mrs. Whycherley through your agency there will be at least one man in the world who is not absolutely hateful to me."

Algy felt that he was making headway fast with the champion of women's rights.

"Is the Colonel very fond of children?" he inquired, *apropos* of nothing.

"Fond of children! good gracious, not! They fidget him into a nervous fever. He is in agonies lest they should tread on his pet corn, or interfere with his collection of beetles and butterflies. He never will stay at any country house where the children come in with the dessert. I wish that horrid Mrs. Whycherley had half-a-dozen boys and girls. He would never look in her direction again."

"I don't think he will marry her as it is," said Algy, calmly. "There's many a slip between the cup and the lip, you know. By the way, I am quite busy at present, Miss Fitz-Markham, thanks to the friendly confidence reposed in me. I am involved in more than one love affair in which other people are the chief actors."

Willing to help Val Curzon, but quite unable to keep such a good story to himself, Algy acquainted his pretty companion with the exceptional nature of Val's wooing, and the unenviable position in which Ephraim Barclay's accusation had landed him.

Aurelia laughed, and listened with all a woman's interest.

"How very odd that such a fashionable butterfly as Mr. Curzon should fall in love with a demure young Quakeress!" she exclaimed, wonderingly. "Is Miss Inglefield very pretty?"

"For those who admire that quiet, fair, pensive style of beauty—yes," said Algy, carefully avoiding the pitfall dug for him. "I prefer a more piquant face myself—a face full of light and change and brilliant dabblerie."

"What very bad taste!" said Aurelia, well aware that he had succeeded in describing herself. "How much I should like to see Miss Inglefield! Of course Mr. Curzon is innocent of the crimes imputed to him by his quaker rival—he must be?"

"He is, or I should allude to them less lightly."



Some absurd misconception is at the bottom of the whole affair, and I have devoted myself to the task of clearing it up."

"What a disinterested, painstaking individual you are! You deserve a monument."

"Thanks; but I am in no hurry to earn that distinction. You see I have so much idle time on my hands, and Doctor Watts—"

"Never mind Doctor Watts—his ornithology at least was very faulty. He wrote 'Birds in their little nests agree,' whereas they don't; they fight like anything as soon as their feathers are grown. Now, if you have promised to go to Verney-street it is almost time you were there."

"I shall not fail to pour oil upon the troubled waters. All I hope is that the Quaker will be conspicuous by his absence."

"Why? are you afraid of him?"

"Afraid! no!" Algy possessed a little man's sensitive feelings with regard to personal bravery. "I never saw the man I was afraid of yet. Miss Fitz-Markham—or the woman either. But it will be easier to introduce the painful subject if Mr. Barclay is not present."

"I understand. I only spoke in jest. Your courage is beyond doubt," said Aurelia, in a gentler tone. "You will let me know what success you meet with. I don't approve of love-making and nonsense of that kind as a rule; but there is something quite exceptional about Mr. Curzon's *affaire de cœur*."

"I will keep you duly posted in all the latest details. Meanwhile I shall not forget the other transaction in which Mr. Whycherley is concerned. It is shameful that you should have to stay here by yourself while she is fascinating, or doing her best to fascinate, the Colonel."

"I don't mind that if I can only checkmate her later on," said Aurelia; and I think I shall succeed in doing so—with your help."

Algy went away to Verney-street while Aurelia Fitz-Markham sat down to await her father's return from the much-disputed garden-party.

## CHAPTER VII.

When Algy Cavendish sent his card up, Rachael Hargrave was more than half inclined to refuse him an audience.

Her strict sense of justice, however, came to Algy's aid, and induced her to see him, although he was Val Curzon's friend.

She had listened to Ephraim Barclay's accusation against her nephew, and it would be only fair and right to hear in turn what Algy might have to say in his favour.

The pure-minded, straightforward, old Quaker lady was feeling sadly perplexed and distressed. Not only had a serious charge been brought against her nephew, but he must needs add to the pain it had caused her by winning Ruth's heart, and rendering her unwilling to marry that sensible young man, Ephraim Barclay.

To Aunt Rachael the complication was a terrible one, while her slight knowledge of the world and its ways rendered her more unfit to cope with such an unexpected dilemma.

She could not permit Ruth to marry Val with such an imputation resting upon him, neither could she compel the girl to become Ephraim Barclay's wife against her will.

Bitterly did Aunt Rachael regret the impulse that had induced her to leave the peaceful village of Penwyrr for the demoralising atmosphere of London.

Not even the attractions of Exeter Hall should ever induce her to set foot in such a dreadful place again.

There had been quite a scene in Verney-street after Val's departure.

Aunt Rachael had enjoined her niece to forget Val Curzon as soon as possible, and to renounce the idea of ever becoming his wife.

Ruth, in firm but gentle words, had declared her intention of remaining faithful to her lover under any circumstances.

Aunt Rachael hardly recognized the passive

yielding girl in this fair, brave-spirited woman. Love had developed Ruth's nature rapidly, bringing all its best qualities to the surface, investing her with courage and reasonable self-assertion under unfair pressure.

That mild, well-meaning, tyrant, her aunt, was about to commence a second exhortation on the duty of submission and obedience when Ephraim Barclay interfered.

"Since Ruth finds it such a hard matter to accept me as her husband," he said, quietly; "I will relinquish all claim upon her. Heaven knows I had looked forward with joy to our marriage, but, aware as I am now of her aversion to me, I will not force her to become my wife. I will marry no woman who has declared that she cares nothing for me in the presence of another man. I should be sorry to see her wedded to that—that scamp as I firmly believe him to be. At the same time, so far as I am concerned Ruth is free."

His voice quivered as he spoke, and his grey eyes looked almost as if there were tears in them.

In his quiet, undemonstrative fashion, Ephraim Barclay loved Ruth, and to renounce all hope of winning her cost him a struggle.

"Nay, Ephraim, be not too hasty in thy decision," pleaded Aunt Rachael, whose heart was set upon the engagement. "Ruth is but young. She knows not her own mind, and—"

"Aunt Rachael, Ephraim has spoken wisely!" interrupted Ruth. "He understands that I am not free to marry him; that from henceforth we can be nothing to each other. In this matter, at least, I know my own mind—I shall never change my opinion!"

"Surely, Ruth, we may continue to be friends?" urged Ephraim.

But Ruth—who should have been grateful to him for acting with so much generosity—remained hard as adamant. He had prejudiced Aunt Rachael against Val Curzon; in Ruth's eyes an unpardonable offence.

"I cannot regard you as a friend," she said, gravely; "while you persist in believing Mr. Curzon to be guilty of more than one crime of which I know him to be innocent!"

She knew! And three months ago Val Curzon had been a stranger to her. So much for the rapid growth of love and trust in a woman's breast.

"So the swindler and duellist I met in Paris had no existence then, save in my own imagination?" retorted poor Ephraim, losing his temper at last. "A very satisfactory conclusion indeed for all, excepting myself, to arrive at!"

"I do not go so far as to cast any doubt upon your good faith," said Ruth; "or upon the existence of the man you name. I only maintain that in identifying him with Mr. Curzon you are acting under a mistake. I shall never think otherwise!"

Ephraim went away, angry and disconsolate, to write to the proprietor of the hotel where he had stayed when in Paris, respecting Valentine Curzon. Feeling himself to be in the right, it was hardly pleasant to be brow-beaten, rebuked, and knocked down into the bargain, when he had only contemplated to unmask a scoundrel.

Matters were at a temporary standstill; a kind of armed neutrality, very terrible to both, had been established between Aunt Rachael and Ruth when Algy Cavendish joined them.

Glad to find them alone Algy plunged at once into the important subject of Val's innocence.

He eulogised his friend warmly as a man of unblemished honour and reputation, one whose conduct had never given rise to unpleasant rumours. His earnest, yet whimsical eloquence, treating the accusation as if it were a thing below serious discussion, succeeded in representing Val's supposed misdemeanours in the light of an impossible absurdity, even to Aunt Rachael.

"Why, my dear madam, should a man, en-

joying your nephew's fortune and social status, deliberately ruin his own prospects by attempting to pass forged bank-notes?" urged Algy.

"Paris is not so far distant from London as to enable him to do such a thing with impunity. Had he really done it detection and punishment would have overtaken him long ago. Val Curzon is received in the best society without eliciting a remark. Should I be here now, pleading his cause, if I were not certain that he had never done anything unworthy of a gentleman? Really the charge is too preposterous. Mr. Barclay will be expected to tender an ample apology!"

Aunt Rachael's face brightened. She was very fond of Val; nothing would give her more pleasure than to be convinced beyond all doubt of his innocence. As for Ruth, the gratitude shining in her soft dove-like eyes was more than enough to repay any man.

"I hope very much that Ephraim Barclay may yet discover he has made a mistake in accusing my nephew of such disgraceful, unchristian conduct," said Aunt Rachael, earnestly. "You appear to have unlimited faith in him yourself."

"I have known him for years," continued Algy. "We were at Oxford together, and I never found Val out in a shady transaction yet. This affair has annoyed him awfully. I couldn't imagine what had happened when he came round to my rooms this morning, Miss Hargrave."

"If he can prove his innocence I shall be ready to receive him again," replied Aunt Rachael; "but Ephraim Barclay is so positive that—"

"He must be met with proof—exactly. Val is going to write to the proprietor of the Hotel de Paris in order to convince you that he was really staying there two years ago, and not at the Hotel d'Angleterre, as affirmed by Mr. Barclay. He will also write to an artist friend who saw him off by the train to Boulogne on his way home. Might I request you, Miss Hargrave, to remain in town until Val can himself remove your last, lingering suspicion?"

"Yes, it is only fair to my nephew. I will delay my departure until this vexatious incident has been finally disposed of, I trust, in a satisfactory manner. Meanwhile, I would rather not see Valentine. His presence here would but give rise to embarrassment."

"Oh, he won't come; he's too much annoyed, you know," said Algy, gravely, aware that Val's anger would most likely tell in his favour.

"It would grieve me sorely to be estranged from my sister's son," Aunt Rachael replied, regretfully. "Kindly tell him from me that—that he will meet with a favourable reception from both Ruth and myself when once am assured of his innocence. From what you have said, I am more than ever inclined to think that Ephraim has made a grave blunder. It can be nothing else, since Ephraim is the soul of truth."

"In that case, he will have to apologise for speaking without sufficient warrant. My friend is not to be annoyed and insulted before ladies with impunity."

When Algy Cavendish was gone, Ruth knelt down beside Aunt Rachael, and kissed her timidly.

"Dear aunt, if I have been undutiful, if I have grieved you, forgive me," she said pleadingly. "I ought not to have gone with cousin Valentine yesterday, only it was so hard to say no. I will do anything you wish with one exception—I cannot marry Ephraim Barclay."

Aunt Rachael laid her thin white hand gently upon the bowed, golden head.

"You would fain marry your cousin Valentine instead?" she said, thoughtfully. "Young hearts are hard to guide. I would that he were less a man of the world, Ruth, since he has won your love."

"Can you wonder that I love him?" murmured the girl.

"Perhaps not. Valentine has the manly

beauty in which Ephraim is lacking, although of the two I should prefer seeing you wedded to the latter. As it is, I will give my consent to your engagement should Valentine succeed in refuting the charge brought against him."

"Aunt Rachael, how good, how kind you are!" exclaimed Ruth, gratefully. "And you forgive me for yesterday?"

"Yes; truly I had intended to rebuke Valentine for taking you to the Inventories—he was the more to blame—but the greater matter drove the lesser one from my mind."

Aunt Rachael stooped to return Ruth's kiss just as Martha Browning entered the drawing-room with a perplexed expression on her homely, pleasant face.

"Miss Ruth, would you mind coming down to my sitting-room for a few minutes, to speak to a young French lady that I've got there?" she asked. "Ma'mselle wants a lodging, but beyond that I can't make out what she says. She's got very little English, and I've got no French, so it's awkward, you see. I've tried to make her understand that I don't let one room, which is what she asked for; but the poor thing seems dazed-like, as if she were in trouble, and I don't like to send her adrift, especially as she is a stranger in London."

"Go, Ruth, and see what ails the young woman. Ascertain if she stands in need of any assistance," said Aunt Rachael, whose charitable instincts never failed her.

Ruth accordingly followed Mrs. Browning to her underground sitting-room. A tall, slim, French girl, with large, mournful, dark eyes, full of slumberous fire and passion, and a pure olive complexion, rose from her seat as they entered, glancing swiftly from the landlady to Ruth.

She was handsome, in a lithe, graceful impulsive foreign style, that had something feline about it. The tired, anxious expression on her face passed away, as she spoke in eager, animated tones to Ruth, delighted to find some one capable of fully comprehending her requirements.

She was a teacher of music, she said, and she had come to London from Paris in the hope of obtaining pupils. She had looked about for suitable lodgings till she was—oh! so weary. Would Madam consent to take her in, allowing her the use of the sitting-room, in which to receive visitors? She could furnish satisfactory references from friends in Paris. No, she knew no one in London, but she had money enough to support her until she succeeded in meeting with employment. Once more, would Madam consent to receive her as a lodger? In that case she could send for her luggage, which was at the station.

Martha Browning hesitated, and Ruth wondered why so young a woman, speaking scarcely any English, should have left Paris and her friends there, to launch herself in London among strangers! The quick-witted Frenchwoman read the hesitation in the landlady's eyes and Ruth's questioning face aright.

"You wonder that I should come here alone, friendless, to earn my living," she said plaintively, taking off her glove as she spoke, and displaying a wedding-ring upon her left hand. "Know, then, that I am married, and to an Englishman. I met him in Paris two years ago, and for six months after our marriage we lived together in almost perfect happiness. My husband was a gentleman of independent means—at least, so he told me. He went out one day, as usual, to go to the *café* that he frequented, but he never returned. *Mon Dieu!* I wonder it did not drive me mad! I spent every franc I had in searching for him, but from that day to this his fate remains a mystery to me."

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Browning. "Does she expect to find him over here? Ask her, Miss Ruth."

"It is my last hope," said the Frenchwoman, in reply to Ruth's gentle inquiry. "He may have been murdered; Paris is a city the most terrible for secret crimes. Yet on the other hand, cruel as it sounds, my hus-

band may only have deserted me. I fancy that his money was running short; he often appeared gloomy and morose. He would never enlighten me as to his affairs or his family, but I have heard him speak of London, and if he is still alive, it is in London that I hope to find him. I have sought him elsewhere in vain. Perhaps here, in his own country, I shall be more successful. Meanwhile I have resumed my maiden name, Marie Benquier. I will not use his until the horrible doubt is solved. Of the two, I would rather that my husband proved dead than false. You cannot tell how I loved and trusted him!"

"I'll take her," said Martha Browning, impulsively, "although I am not accustomed to let in that way. I couldn't refuse after listening to such a story, Miss Ruth!"

And that was how Marie Benquier became an inmate of the house in Verney-street.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A SATISFACTORY letter arrived from the proprietor of the Hotel de Paris in due course, and Val Curzon lost no time in submitting it to Aunt Rachael, through the medium of Algy Cavendish.

The Frenchman positively affirmed that Mr. Valentine Curzon had stayed at his hotel exactly two years ago, that he had paid his hotel bill before leaving, and behaved in every way as a gentleman while he remained there, his conduct exciting no comment.

Evidently the alleged duel and the forged bank-notes had not come under the writer's notice, while his description of Val's personal appearance, given at the latter's request, tallied exactly with the original.

Alphonse Greville, Val's artist friend, also wrote, offering, if necessary, to come to England for the purpose of helping to clear him from Ephraim Barclay's charge by stating what he knew of Val's career while in Paris, which was all in his favour.

"You are too lazy, *mon ami*," said the vivacious Frenchman; "to have made violent love, fought a duel, and circulated forged notes within such a short space of time without demanding the assistance of a friend. On that ground alone I can swear to your innocence. *Au sérieux*, your accuser must be either a fool or a madman. Should you desire to call him out, and pay a visit to Calais sands some fine morning, I shall be happy to act as your second."

These letters and Algy's own influence proved too strong for Aunt Rachael. In the face of such evidence she could not reasonably continue to doubt her nephew. Indeed, she had no wish to do so. It gave her far more pleasure to be able to receive him back into favour with the damaging aspersion removed.

Since Ruth's happiness hung in the balance, depending upon a favourable verdict for her lover, his moral worth, or his want of it, had become a question of serious importance.

Happily the question had met with a favourable reply. Aunt Rachael decided in her own mind that Ephraim Barclay had confounded Val Curzon with some other man of the same name. She actually told him so in rather severe terms, requesting him to retract his accusation, and offer an apology.

But this Ephraim would not do. He stuck to his original opinion, sturdily, and refused to acknowledge himself in the wrong, not without some evidence to justify him in so doing.

In reply to his letter of inquiry the proprietor of the Hotel d'Angleterre—where he had stayed with his patient—declared that a Mr. Valentine Curzon had been there at the same time, that he had been guilty of the various misdemeanours imputed to him, and that his hotel bill still waited to be settled. Val Curzon was accurately described in the letter. Unfortunately the French gentleman injured in the duel had gone to South Africa with his wife. Otherwise Ephraim would have had their testimony as well to help him.

But when he showed this letter to Aunt Rachael it only succeeded in making her angry.

She had decided that her nephew was innocent. Consequently any evidence to the contrary was most unwelcome. It failed to shake her re-established belief in him.

She even began to suspect Ephraim Barclay of malicious motives in thus persistently attacking Val.

"I can only conclude that some worthless man, an adept in wickedness, assumed my nephew's name and passed for him, in order to escape detection, or to throw suspicion upon an innocent individual," she said, firmly. "He has furnished me with ample proof that his conduct while in Paris was exemplary. I wonder, Ephraim, that such obstinate prejudice should emanate from thee."

"Could the cleverest rogue going have assumed Mr. Curzon's voice, features, manner, as well as his name?" demanded Ephraim angrily, aware that all the others were ranged against him. "I am positive that I have made no mistake. I wouldn't retract a word that I have uttered, or apologise, to save my life!"

"I cannot answer thy question," said Aunt Rachael, severely, "but I fear, Ephraim, that some revengeful feeling, some dislike entertained against my nephew, influences thee in this matter. I expect him here to-day, and unless thou canst meet him in a friendly spirit, believing him to be, like thyself, an honest man, perhaps—"

"I had better stay away altogether," interrupted poor Ephraim bitterly. "My opinion agrees with yours. I should hardly care to meet Mr. Curzon, since I cannot regard him from any point of view but my own—and in the matter of Ruth at least he has done me grievous injury."

"Thus far I sympathise with you," began Aunt Rachael, but Ephraim had seized his hat and was half way downstairs before she could finish her sentence.

The young Quaker felt sadly aggrieved. It was not to be wondered at that he disliked Val Curzon.

Val had robbed him of Ruth, whom he had, from a boy, regarded as his own peculiar property. Val had knocked him down, and estranged even Rachael Hargrave from him, when Ephraim had indignantly denounced him as a common swindler.

Fortune in this case favoured the supposed rogue rather than the honest man.

Ephraim's heart swelled with a sense of cruel injustice as he returned to his modest lodging, and prepared to leave town at once for Penwyrr.

They did not trouble themselves much about him in Verney-street, however. Algy had apprised Val of his success as a mediator, and Val had immediately put in an appearance, retaining a somewhat injured air that was not without its effect upon the two women.

In their respective fashions Aunt Rachael and Ruth strove to atone for the annoyance and the banishment to which the handsome martyr had been subjected.

Ruth smiled upon her lover with soft dove-like eyes, full of happiness; and Aunt Rachael, in a few kind words, gave her consent to their engagement.

Val's wounded feelings were not proof against such healing balm as this. He was his old radiant self again directly.

Aunt Rachael was considerate enough to quit the room presently on the plea of requiring some more wool for her knitting, thus leaving the lovers in undisturbed enjoyment of each other's society.

Val's first impulse was to imprison Ruth in his arms, and rain kisses upon her fair flower-like face, till she drew herself away from him with a shy maidenly modesty that constituted her principal charm in Val's eyes.

He was in the habit of flirting furiously with every pretty girl willing to join him in this pastime, but he would not have thought



ter to Aunt  
making her  
w was inno-  
to the con-  
to shake

aim Barclay  
persistently

ne worthless  
assumed my  
in, in order  
picion upon  
ad, firmly,  
proof that  
emplary. I  
timate pre-

going have  
ures, man-  
demanded  
the others  
m positive  
I wouldn't  
or apolo-

said Aunt  
rain, that  
like ences-  
these in  
o-day, and  
a friendly  
themselves, an

er," inter-  
y opinion  
y care to  
gard him  
and—and  
has done

n," began  
eized his  
before she

ved. It  
disliked

he had,  
peculiar  
own, and  
om him,  
nounced

supposed

sense of  
modest  
at once

much  
c. Algy  
ediator,  
appear-  
air that  
he two

Rachael  
oyance  
andsome

h soft  
t Aunt  
or con-

proof  
e was

ugh to  
equir-  
thus  
ment

Ruth  
fair  
from  
con-

sally  
m in  
ought

of making such a girl his wife. As a rule men do not care to marry a coquette, however much they may admire her and court her society.

Even a gay Lothario frequently chooses a quiet, modest, unassuming partner for life when he enters the state of matrimony, one who will never seek to win admiration and homage from other men; a woman to whom he can safely confide his name and his honour, certain that she will preserve both inviolate.

"My dear little girl, how can I ever thank you for proving so staunch when things looked very black against me?" said Val, fondly. "If I had needed any proof of your love, your refusal to think evil of me would have been more than sufficient!"

"I knew that Ephraim had mistaken you for someone else—that you were innocent of the dreadful charges he brought against you," she murmured. "Oh, Val! I have been so unhappy, so anxious for you to refute those charges, not on my account, but to satisfy Aunt Rachael!"

"And she is satisfied."

"Yes. Is it not good of her to consent to our engagement? I knew it was her wish that I should marry Ephraim Barclay, but she has set it aside and accepted the new engagement without a reproachful word."

"What has become of that amiable individual, Mr. Barclay? Algy says that he adheres to his unflattering opinion of me in spite of all that has been said in my favour."

"He was here this morning," said Ruth gently, "but he will not come again. I think he is going back to Penwyr. Aunt Rachael is angry with him for being so obstinate. Is it not strange, Val, that he should adhere to such an improbable story in all good faith?"

"Very. I am quite willing to believe that a man of my name was staying at the Hotel d'Angleterre, as he affirms. He may have resembled me more or less, and his conduct was certainly shady; but to identify me with the fellow, and to persist in doing so in the face of evidence to the contrary, is beyond a joke. Such an eccentric individual as Mr. Barclay will be better off amidst his native wilds. We can afford to laugh at him, darling! When do you think Aunt Rachael will let me claim you?"

"Oh, not yet for a long while," said Ruth, with downcast eyes. "She spoke to me this morning about—about our marriage, Val. It must not take place, Aunt Rachael says, until you are duly qualified as a doctor."

"By Jove! why not?"

"Promise not to be angry if I tell you her reason?"

"I couldn't be angry with you if I tried."

"Well, then, Aunt Rachael does not approve of your mode of living. She thinks you are wasting precious time, and contracting idle, expensive habits. She means you to work hard if—if you really wish to make me your wife."

"Does she wish me to join the Society of Friends as well?" inquired Val, gravely.

"You are laughing at me, and that is not kind," said Ruth, with a tinge of wounded love in her voice. "Val, we must understand each other before we go any further. I will never consent to marry a fashionable, useless man of the world."

"I won't ask you to do so," he replied, drawing her towards him fondly and proudly, feeling as he gazed into the lucid depths of her soft grey eyes that it behoved him to do his utmost in return for the priceless treasure of her love. "I will try to render myself worthy of you, my darling. I will put my shoulder to the wheel and make the best use of any talent I possess. At that rate it won't be long before I have fulfilled Aunt Rachael's conditions, and won my wife."

She gave him a glance full of trust and gratitude.

"I am sure you can do great things if you try."

(To be continued.)

## VERNON'S DESTINY.

—8—

### CHAPTER VIII.

THE Major turned to his wife. For the first time in their married life he felt angry with her, and showed it.

"Isola, what is the meaning of this?"

But the non-arrival of the expected ones had had quite a different effect upon Mrs. Merton from that it had produced upon her husband. On first reaching the station she had seemed ill and nervous—had hardly been able to control her emotion.

Now she was perfectly calm. The pretty pink colour had returned to her cheeks. She stood smiling at the Major's side as self-possessed, as contented with herself and things in general, as though the fair young girl who had, in a measure, been committed to her charge were there before them in health and safety.

"I don't know," she said, in reply to the Major's question, giving her shoulders a little shrug. "Why should you ask me, Jim?"

"Miss Charteris left my house under your care. I consider you answerable for her to me!"

Isola giggled.

"Really, I can't help it, if a foolish, romantic child loses her train. People in love can't be expected to be punctual."

"I am not alluding to last night," said Major Merton, gravely. "I can in a measure believe that was an accident, but if I know anything of Nell she would have been in such distress at having to pass a night away from home, nothing would have kept her from returning by the earliest train to-day!"

"Apparently, then, you do not know anything of her," sneered Isola, "for you see she certainly has not returned."

He looked vexed, feeling it was the first time his wife's shallow nature had dawned on him.

"Isola, I must insist upon your answering me seriously. Have you any idea of where your brother and Miss Charteris can be?"

"Not the slightest!"

"When you left them yesterday, had you the least suspicion that—"

He stopped short for sheer want of words. Somehow, he could not bring himself to ask his wife if she had connived at his ward's elopement.

"Really, Jim, you are putting me through a most ridiculous cross-examination. I dare say Miss Charteris is safe enough. You must blame Rex—not me. I'm not my brother's keeper!"

Very calm and stern looked Major Merton. For once Isola quailed beneath his glance.

"The boy can drive you home," he said, coldly, to his wife. "I am going to Raglan."

"What nonsense!"

"And I may have to go to London. You had better not expect me till you see me. Make some excuse to your sister for my seeming want of courtesy, and tell Vernon I will write to him from London!"

"But it is too ridiculous your rushing off in this fashion! I dare say they will both turn up safely by the next train. Be rational, and stay at home!"

"I cannot rest until I know the fate of my dead friend's child. I do not ask you to share my anxiety. Heaven forgive you, Isola, if aught of harm has happened to Helen Charteris, for the guilt of it will rest, in my eyes, at your door!"

The train for Monmouth was seen then coming up; the Major took his seat in it without another word to his wife.

Very heavy was his heart as he started on that lonely journey. He reproached himself most bitterly for giving way, and not opposing the expedition of yesterday. Had he only been firm all this trouble would have been averted.

Four-and-twenty hours ago Nell was safe

beneath his own roof. Now—he almost shuddered as the uncertainty of her fate came home to him.

"If only poor Charteris had made a will like other people," he muttered to himself; "the way he left his affairs was enough to make the child the prey of a fortune-hunter. Why, if she married a chimney-sweep she gets her five thousand a year paid regularly; he can't touch the principal, but he is a rich man for life! Poor little thing! Heaven help her if she has married Reginald Travers! My wife loves him; but to my mind he is a scoundrel. I'll warrant it was a deep-laid scheme. He had paid his shilling at Somerset House and read the Colonel's will. He knew that he had but to win over a little innocent school-girl, and his whole future was provided for. My poor Isola has been but a tool in his hands. I must not blame her too much. Of course that scoundrel appealed to her sisterly affections and worked on her feelings; but oh! I wish he had been dead before I ever let him cross my threshold. I shall never get over the disgrace of this. To my last hour I shall feel I have been false to my Colonel's trust!"

There was a long delay at Monmouth, and the Major availed himself of it. Finding an intelligent-looking porter, he asked him if he had been on duty when the first train from Raglan passed through.

"Yes, sir; a gentleman's groom brought a letter and tipped me five shillings to give it to a party who was expected by that train. I looked into every carriage there was on the train before I found the right one."

"Then you saw all the passengers?"

"There weren't many to see, sir—not a dozen, I reckon, altogether."

"Did you notice a gentleman and a young lady—fair hair, blue eyes, and dressed in black?" asked the Major, almost hating himself as he described poor little Nell.

"That's the party that had the letter, I expect, sir. A tall, soldier-like gent with black hair and eyes. He had a lady with him right enough, but I can't tell what she was like."

"Did not you see her?"

"Not a bit of it, sir; she was lying down at one end of the carriage fast asleep. I know she had a black dress and a jacket trimmed with some sort of fur; but, as to her face, I couldn't get a glimpse of it."

"How did you know he was the person to whom you had to give the letter?"

"That was easy enough, sir; it was addressed to Captain Denzil, and I just asked every gent I came to if it were for him."

Captain Denzil! The words bewildered the Major; he knew that the officer had been an intimate friend of the Travers family, but he believed they had cut him after the fashion of the rest of respectable society, when the news of some dishonourable conduct of his came from Monaco.

He himself had never met the Captain; he had told Isa, once for all, she must drop the acquaintance, and he believed she had done so.

For one moment he was staggered, then he felt relieved. If Reginald Travers were scoundrel enough to steal Nell Charteris from her home, he would not hesitate to take a feigned name, supposing it suited himself to do so—of course that was it.

"Have you any idea where they are going?" and he slipped a handsome donation into the porter's hand.

"London, sir! The guard told me the carriage was reserved; there can't be a doubt the couple I saw were off to London. The gentleman was free with his money; he told the guard his wife was an invalid, and he couldn't have her disturbed for anything."

"What time would that train reach London?"

"It was a slow one, sir. She's not due before three, and maybe she'd be later, for there's been an accident on the line; we've just got word of it. A luggage train ran into the ten o'clock from Paddington, and

there's a block on the line somewhere near Gloucester."

Major Merton thought his troubles had no end. That was the very train by which his sister-in-law was to leave London under Guy Vernon's escort.

"Is it a bad accident—any lives lost?"

"Six killed, a dozen or more injured; we're expecting more news. Here's the Raglan train coming up. Are you going on, sir?"

"No," said poor Major Merton, feeling dragged two ways, and yet sure neither of them was to Merton. "I must get to London, or to the place where the accident took place."

"There's a London train due in half-an-hour, sir—get up about seven to-night."

The conflicting claims of poor wandering Nell, fast rushing to her own misery, of Lena lying wounded—perhaps dying—in a strange place, and his own Isola waiting in suspense at home, driven frantic by the news of the accident. All these conflicting interests well-nigh tortured the brave old soldier, but he was staunch to his trust; he would see first to the interests of the orphan girl confided to him.

He was very fond of Lena, and he almost worshipped his wife, but he would leave the one alone in pain, the other in suspense, rather than lose the chance of saving Nell Charteris from the folly that might blight her whole life.

Everyone of the hours he spent in the train seemed to have more than its full share of minutes. His companion could talk of nothing but the accident. It appeared the porter's account had been none too serious, the loss of life and the number of injured were even greater than had been at first supposed. At present no list of names had been published, but one would appear as soon as possible. The sufferers had been conveyed to the nearest hospital, and some of them to their own homes, or the houses of friends who, chancing to reside in the neighbourhood, had gladly received them. Everything that medical skill could do would be done.

It was, at least, a consolation to the Major to feel Lena would not suffer by his absence, but still, his heart felt very heavy when he at last found himself on the platform at Paddington.

He hated the rôle that lay before him. Some men, if there are no very near interests at stake, rather enjoy assuming the part of amateur detectives; some men can derive real gratification from hunting out a mystery, cross-examining refractory people and the like, but our Major was not of this type. A simple, kindly English gentleman, there was something to him abhorrent in the part of spy, however necessary. When he went up to a cabman at Paddington to ask a few questions he felt as much ashamed of himself as though he were the guilty person instead of the injured one on his track.

"Were you here this afternoon?"

The man touched his hat.

"A good part of it, sir."

"Did you notice a gentleman and a young lady who came up by the train from Monmouth a little after three?"

"I think I did, sir. A youngish-looking gentleman with black hair and eyes, dressed as if he thought himself somebody."

"Yes. And the lady would be very young—fair, and dressed in mourning?"

"I saw 'em, sir; they took a cab and drove off pretty sharp, for you see they'd no luggage to hinder 'em."

"Where did they go to?"

"King's-croce Station."

The Major's face fell.

"Bless me, sir," said the sympathising cabby, "that was only a blind. When folks run off with a young lady, they don't want to be tracked, and so they often tell a man to drive to some by-railway station; then when you're out in the street and there's no one listening, they pull you up sharp and tell you the real place. There's nothing in that, sir; it happens every day."

"But how am I to find out the real place?"

"Just you ask the cabman, sir, and make it worth his while to tell you. It was No. 478 they drove off in—a real civil fellow when he's not in drink, regular as possible in his work. He'll be here again to-morrow morning, sure as a shot. I'll give him a hint to-night if you like, sir, down at the shelter, that you want to see him."

Major Merton caught at the idea, rewarded the cabby, and departed to his hotel, feeling as if he had lived many years since the morning. He sent off a telegram to his wife, telling her he might be detained two or three days in town, and assuring her he would keep her supplied with news of Lena. Then he ordered dinner, and sat down to it with a worse appetite than was often his ill fate to possess.

He could not eat, he could not smoke. A strange uneasiness haunted him; he seemed to see before him the face of Nell Charteris, with a strange unknown terror shining in her blue eyes. He was no believer in the supernatural, and yet he felt a nameless, invisible presence near him whose voiceless cry urged him to go to the rescue of his old friend's child. James Merton was not given to act on impulse, but to-night he could not rest; something stronger than himself urged him to put on his hat, and go forth again into the London streets. He knew not what he expected to find there; he could not have told what made him feel nearer Nell than in the warm comfortable sitting-room at the hotel, but he did feel nearer.

He had no aim before him, no special place he meant to visit. He strolled in the direction of his club, wondering if any of the old Indian comrades he so often met there carried half so heavy a heart as his own.

"Merton, by all that's wonderful!" and a grizzly bearded old officer buttonholed the Major in high delight at the encounter. "Why, what an age it is since I heard anything of you? Someone told me you had married and gone in for domestic felicity in the country."

"Come and judge for yourself of its truth," said the Major heartily. "We are living at Merton Park, near Chipstow, and my wife will welcome you very warmly for my sake."

Colonel Grimshaw's face changed suddenly. He looked like a man stricken by some terribly unexpected blow.

"You don't mean that you are Merton of Merton Park?" he exclaimed. "I declare I had not the slightest idea of it. Of course I know the name's the same, and I heard long ago you were of a west-country family, but I never suspected this, I can assure you."

His manner was so peculiar that for a second the Major felt almost inclined to suspect his old comrade of having indulged in a glass too much, but there was something in Colonel Grimshaw's pale, troubled face, which made this idea vanish as soon as it arose.

"What's the matter?" asked Major Merton simply. "Why should the mere mention of my home have such an effect upon you?"

"It was only that I had heard—" he broke off abruptly. "I beg your pardon, Merton, I can't tell you."

"I can guess. You heard that the Master of Merton Park had married a girl young enough to be his daughter, and you thought him a fool for his pains. Well, just listen to me! My wife may be less than half my age; she may be a child in her teens, but she makes me happy, and I love her better than life itself."

"I assure you," began the Colonel, awkwardly, "I never thought of doubting it."

"But you had heard a rumour to the contrary?"

"I had heard strange things of Merton Park, but from what you tell me they must be cruel falsehoods. Why, a man actually dared to tell me Mrs. Merton had been engaged to that stamp Denzil for five years, when she threw him over to marry an Indian nabob. It's shameful the lies people will tell. Why, your wife must have been a child in the nursery at the time her supposed engagement began?"

"Denzil was known to her family before he went to the bad. Indeed, he was pretty intimate with them!"

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Never!"

"Well, I may as well make a clean breast of it to you. All I've heard is clearly a parcel of falsehoods, so they can't pain you; and really, Merton, I think something ought to be done to prevent people swearing their neighbours' characters away. Only if I hadn't met you and discovered you were the master of Merton Park, and perfectly happy in your married life, I should have believed the estate belonged to some amiable old idiot who let his wife play fast-and-loose with other men, and invited her old lovers to his house under his very eyes."

"They have dared to say that?"

"Aye! there's a rumour about Denzil is to be set on his legs once more by the efforts of a former fiancée, that he is even now her guest under an assumed name, and that to make her husband quite blind to her little foibles she has passed the gallant officer off as a brother of her own, who sailed for Sydney last autumn."

Luckily he talked right on without ever pausing for a reply; luckily he never glanced at his friend's face.

Colonel Grimshaw was rather a pompous man, and dearly loved the sound of his own voice. He went on eagerly,—

"It ought to be put a stop to, Merton. If I were you I'd trace the rumour to its source, and call the author of it to account. Of course you'd have to cross to France to settle the affair, as duels aren't allowed here; but still the first thing's to trace the offender. You couldn't fight Denzil; he's beneath the notice of a gentleman!"

"Of course!"

How altered was the kindly voice!—how unnaturally the lips trembled!

"Well, for your wife's sake, I really think you ought to see to things. Now, don't you agree?"

"Yes. By the way, Grimshaw, I suppose you have seen Denzil? What is he like?"

"Oh, I knew him before he became a black-leg. He's devilishly handsome, and has no end of a way with women. Can't say I was ever taken by his face myself. There's something to my mind Satanic in the expression; still his features are splendid, regular, and marked as though they'd been carved in marble; his hair and eyes are jet black, and he has a peculiarly pleasing voice; but for that voice I don't think half as many people would have believed in him."

"Not many do now!"

"No! He has a sister somewhere in London, who kept faithful to him till lately. Even she has turned against him now—a grim old maid, with a nice little complicity left her by her father, which neither Denzil nor his mother could make away with. Many a bank-note found its way into the scamp's pocket from her, but that's all altered now."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"Miss Armstrong! Bless me, yes; but you can't suspect her of setting the rumour about, Jim? I doubt if she's ever heard it!"

"I should like to ask her."

"You're a brave hand if you do! She's a very pious old lady, I believe, and will be shocked to death if you mention such a report to her."

"I'll risk that. Grimshaw, old friend, give me that address. I ask it as a favour!"

"I don't think I should give it to you, Jim, only you see any London Directory would help you if I refused. Miss Armstrong has lived in one house for thirty years, and will probably die there. It's called the 'Gables,' and is as well known at Kennington as the Park itself."

"I am very much obliged to you."

Grimshaw watched him till he was out of sight. A very unobservant man, he never noticed the bowed head and heavy step. He went home quite satisfied that Mrs. Merton



was the best of wives, and her husband owed him eternal gratitude for being warned of the rumour which threatened to blight her fair fame.

"It looks black," muttered poor Jim Merton, as he got into bed. "It looks very black against my darling, but I'll trust her still, until I have the proof that she's deceived me. I'll never harbour an unkind thought of her. I swore to love and cherish her. I'll do more. I'll trust her, through good report and ill report, until I know she's been false to me."

There was something almost sublime in the old soldier's faith in the wife of his old age. Jim Merton was not simpleton. If once it were proved Isola was not the loving, gentle creature he had thought her he would admit the fact, but nothing but actual certainty of her guilt would make him doubt her.

He hardly closed his eyes all night. He had causes enough for uneasiness, apart from the cruel slander of his wife. He had two very painful subjects for alarm—the fate of Nell Charteris and the injuries of his sister-in-law. If Isola was killed or were crippled, it seemed to the Major he could never forgive himself, since it was at his instigation she had taken that fatal journey.

The friendly caddy of the day before had told him his mate would not be at the railway station before ten, so that the Major had no need to hurry over his breakfast.

The newspapers were encouraging in their report of the accident, for though Isola and Sir Guy Vernon were among the list of injured, it was specially stated that they were doing well, and no fears entertained for their recovery.

Two telegrams were brought the Major as he sat at breakfast. One from his wife, saying she had heard nothing of Miss Charteris; the other in reply to the one Major Merton had dispatched to the scene of the accident. It was very comforting.

"Miss Travers has been taken to Charteris Hall. No danger; but must be kept quiet. Useless for her friends to come at present. Will send bulletin daily."

So one of the Major's anxieties was lulled, and he drove to Paddington in a far more cheerful frame of mind. But here disappointment awaited him, for No. 478 was not forthcoming.

"I'm real sorry, sir," said his friend of yesterday; "I went down and spoke to him myself about it, and he turned round and denied he'd ever seen such a face. I told him you was a right sort of gent as 'd come down 'andsome if he spoke out, and he said he thought it better worth his while to 'old his tongue. I reckon, sir, the face I saw is the party you're after, and they're just paying my mate to keep quiet about it."

"And you think he can't be won over?"

Cabby shook his head.

"He ain't here at all, sir; he's off on the drink. They must have given him a rare bit of money."

The Major hurried away; it was useless to wait. All clue was lost, and, so far as Nell was concerned, he might have gone back to Chepstow at once; but he had another piece of business in hand, to go and seek out Miss Armstrong.

Fierce as she was, he must trouble her with a tale of scandal, for the aching doubt, once raised in his heart, must be set at rest before he saw his wife again.

How could he take her in his arms when he did not know but what she had deceived him systematically for weeks? He would never look upon Isola's face until he had discovered the true name of the guest he had never been able to like.

He would not return to Merton Park until he knew whether the companion of Nell's flight was Reginald Travers or Captain Denzil.

He reached Kennington at three. He had spent the interval in inquiring at several private hotels, and putting a few carefully-worded advertisements in the hands of a newspaper agent.

He found Grimshaw was right. The "Gables" and Miss Armstrong were quite public characters.

The house was quite an anomaly. Although in the centre of a bustling street it stood back from the pavement quite a hundred yards, and was surrounded by quite an extensive garden at the rear. Besides this remarkably long front court, quite a dozen houses of moderate size could have been built upon Miss Armstrong's land, and no doubt her fine walks and velvet lawns were looked on with great envy by the dwellers in the poky villas in the same street; but poor Major Merton was too preoccupied to notice anything except that the gravel showed unmistakable signs of recent wheels.

"Can she have gone away?" and his heart beat faster at the fear as he pulled the bell.

"Can I see Miss Armstrong?"

"Miss Armstrong never sees strangers, sir."

"It is on very particular business."

"Miss Armstrong has no business but the saving of her soul," returned the tall, gaunt female, who, in a hideous costume of rhubarb serge trimmed with red braid, and made after the fashion patronized doubtless by Noah's wife, seemed a standing protest against the wickedness of modern pomps and vanities.

"I must see Miss Armstrong."

"I say you can't. Mistress is busy."

"Will you take her my card?"

"Miss Armstrong objects to cards. She says they're vanity and vexation of spirit."

"Will you take her my name then?"

pleaded the sorely-tried visitor. "Tell her that I ask as a personal favour a five minutes' interview."

Something in his voice must have touched the heart beneath the rhubarb serge, for she softened visibly.

"I don't mind, sir, but it will be of no use unless," and she brightened, "you happen to be a minister."

"I am not that; but tell Miss Armstrong the happiness of two human beings depends on my seeing her. Tell her I am Major Merton, and that I promise faithfully not to detain her beyond a few moments."

"You're not a Major of the army, are you?"

"I am in the army, certainly."

"Missis can't abide the Salvation Army, 'cause its emptied Little Bethel."

"Tell her I have nothing to do with that. I am willing to subscribe handsomely to Little Bethel if she will only see me."

A brief delay, and he was in Miss Armstrong's presence, an austere virgin well on in the fifties. Her handmaiden was not very attractive-looking, but her plainness was perfect beauty in comparison to her lady's ugliness. Miss Armstrong wore a kind of yellow-flannel dressing gown; a black crape bonnet (it is a peculiar habit of ultra religious females to wear bonnets indoors—this little eccentricity they share with charwomen, and both classes prefer the article to be of rusty black crape) surmounted her sparse grey hair, and her hands, which were so lean that the fingers resembled hen's claws, were encased in black mittens.

"Man of wrath," was her greeting to Major Merton, "why have you broken in upon my peace and tranquillity?"

"To tell you of a great service in your power to render to a fellow-creature, madam. I am convinced that a member of so religious a community as the fold of Little Bethel will not refuse to grant my request."

"Not money," said Miss Armstrong, quickly.

"You beg very nicely, but no better than we can do ourselves. Everyone at Little Bethel is quick at begging, so it stands to reason we have not much left to give away."

Major Merton explained he was a rich man; he only wanted a little information, at which his host thawed rapidly.

"I am often applied to by antiquarians," she replied blandly. "Whenever anyone wants to write a fresh work on Kennington they come to me. Now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Madam, where is your brother?"

Miss Armstrong threw up her hands.

"Has he committed murder or forgery, or anything of that sort? Do you want him to send him off to prison that you come here on his track?"

"I want nothing of the sort. Oh, madam, all I seek is proof of his whereabouts during the last few weeks."

"He left London in December."

"And for where?"

"I don't think I ought to tell you. Rex is very far from the fold; but you see, sir, he's my own flesh and blood, and, though I can't get our pastor and his lambs to agree with me, blood is thicker than water."

"I promise you no harm can come to him from what you tell me. I am not one of his creditors, I assure you."

"Will you swear that?"

"If you wish it."

"Well, I always held fast by Rex. I wouldn't pay his debts, but he was always welcome to hang up his hat here, and I found him a stray bank-note when he needed it till last December, and then we parted. He was going, as I thought, to destruction, and I thought it time to wash my hands of him."

Poor Major Merton! But it was useless attempting to hurry Miss Armstrong; she would tell her story in her own way, or not at all.

"He wasn't content with horse-racing and cards, and such-like sins, sir, but he must do worse—he actually fell in love. She was a pretty little thing, and I had her here once for a month, and promised them a kitchen clock when they married; but they never did marry. She had a face like a wax doll, and he was just a fool in her hands. It went on for five years; she always said he wasn't rich enough, or she was too young. She looked a child, though she must have been six-and-twenty. Well, one fine morning she just flung him over, and married an Indian officer old enough to be her father. I have heard his name, but I don't hold with vanities, so I forgot it."

The Major bowed.

"My brother went to the bad headlong. All his friends forsook him. I was just the only creature who kept faithful to him, and I'd never have turned against him, but he made up his mind to go back to her."

"But she was married."

"I know. He said they could be 'friends,' and he let her smuggle him into her husband's house under a false name, as though he was ashamed of his own. I told him he was just going to his ruin; for when a man has once loved a woman, as he did that pretty wax doll, it isn't friends he'll be with her, at any rate, till they are old and grey. Rex wouldn't give up the idea and stay quietly here, so he went to Chepstow, and I washed my hands of him."

"And have you seen nothing of him since?"

"Nothing, sir. I'm a woman of my word, and I wouldn't go from it. Until this morning I had well-nigh forgotten his existence."

"And then—"

"I had a letter from him, inviting me to his wedding, sir. I thought some one was trying to make a fool of me, so I just put on my things and went across to the big parish church I'd never thought to set foot in—not that I believed a word of it—only I wanted to see what happened. I went there at nine, and I don't suppose I'd waited five minutes when he came in as bold as brass, and a young thing with him that looked more fit for a nursery than to be a wife; but a wife she is, sir, as fast as ring and book can make her, and he's taken her off to France for the honeymoon, and I was that glad to think I'd misjudged him, and he was well off with the old love, that I told him as soon as they were settled I'd take his wife with me shopping, and choose the finest kitchen clock that money could provide."

"I am afraid I am troubling you very much, Miss Armstrong, but—"



["DO YOU WANT ME TO SEND HIM OFF TO PRISON THAT YOU COME HERE ON HIS TRACK?" MRS. ARMSTRONG CRIED BITTERLY.]

"Not at all. They came back here, and had a cup of coffee. I don't hold with anything stronger, and when that child put back her veil I saw she had a pretty face, and I liked her as I never could like that Isa Travers, though she was here a whole month, and went to Little Bethel regular. He called her Nell, and, somehow, the name suited her. He promised to send me her likeness from Paris."

"Have you a likeness of him?"

"Aye! he was a rare one for spending money. I've more likenesses of him than you can count, one with Isa Travers on his arm. I'll show you that; it was taken in his best days, before she jilted him."

Major Merton put a bank-note upon the table, stammered something about a gift to Little Bethel, and departed. He never knew how he got out of the house, how he crept down the long weary front court, only he felt something had gone out from him he could never have again. He might live on for years, but the hope and joy of his life had died out. Isa, his wife, had betrayed him. He had loved her as it comes to few women to be loved, had trusted her as his own self, and in return she invited her old lover to his house and introduced him as her brother! Not content with that, she let him get possession of her husband's fair young ward, and bind her to him by chains that death alone could break.

How he pitied Nell! His whole soul grieved for her even in his own pain. She was such a child—such a happy, confiding child—and she was a wedded wife now—wedded to a man who passionately adored another woman, who had outraged every law of honour, every duty of hospitality, and married her for her money.

"Poor little Nell! Heaven help her!" breathed the Major. "My trouble is hard enough, but one doesn't feel pain under the turf, and I'm past sixty; so, please Heaven, my rest's not far off; but she, poor thing, may have fifty years to live—fifty years at that

man's side, tied to a creature like that. How could he do it? He might have pitied her youth, if he had no compassion on my grey hairs. He has wronged us both, but poor Nell's burden is heavier than mine."

He went into the church and saw the clerk, who showed him the register, and the two names—Reginald Denzil, Helen Charteris. It brought the bitterness of the truth home to the old man with cruel force. Henceforward these two were one. Poor little Nell! He went back to his hotel.

Last night he had been restless and uneasy; a great task had lain before him, an awful doubt had been haunting his thoughts; no task was left him now, no doubts troubled him—he knew all.

"I can never see her again," he thought to himself; "never again. I must write to her. She shall have the Park, and I'll see she has plenty of money. I can go abroad."

He repeated this again and again. He even ordered writing paper, and sat down with pen and ink before him to begin the letter. But he could not frame the sentences he had planned.

With his whole life wrecked, his future a blank, his home desolate, he yet could not write unkindly to the syren who had so bewitched him.

He paused. Outside he could hear the wind raging fiercely. He drew aside the curtains, and saw that the snow was falling in thick white flakes.

"It will make everything white," thought the brave old soldier; "everything but her. Isola's soul was once as fair and spotless as those flakes of snow. But now—"

He stood watching the white downpour. It was bitterly cold, and few people were abroad that night. All who had a warm fireside lingered there instead of exposing themselves to the elements.

The Major was staying in the Strand, so he found plenty to interest him in the prospect

from the window, for though there were fewer passers-by than usual necessity always drives some lonely ones abroad.

There were the broad-winners walking homewards, the pleasure-seekers on their way to the theatres—these in themselves made up a long line of ever-changing faces.

And among those faces, if he had but known it, was one familiar to the Major. If he had only begun his watch a moment sooner he must have seen a slight, girlish creature creep stealthily along, as though she feared to raise her eyes lest she should meet an enemy or an unkind word.

That little, lonely wanderer was the heiress of five thousand a year—the girl who had been lured from her home by a ruse as cruel as it was wicked.

Major Merton had read the register of her marriage, and had recognised her signature, had mourned over her falling into the power of one so base as Reginald Denzil, *alias* Travers, and yet here she was, at eight o'clock on a winter's night, alone and unprotected in the London streets!

What did it mean?

Alas! alas! the evil omen of the white hyacinth was surely being fulfilled. Grievous troubles and many perils loomed before poor little Nell; and the man who, in her dream, had wished to be her saviour, her preserver, lay at Charteris Hall in a state of coma so alarming that each moment they feared it might pass into the sleep of death.

(To be continued.)

The most censorious are generally the least judicious, who, having nothing to recommend themselves, will be finding fault with others. No man envies the merit of another who has enough of his own.





["KISS ME," DUNCAN DEMANDED; AND FOR ESTRELLA SAW THEIR PASSIONATE EMBRACE.]

NOVELLETTE.]

## SORELY UNFORGIVING.

—O—

### CHAPTER I.

"I WILL never forgive you the wrong you have done me," the girl said, her dark eyes blazing with outraged love and pride.

"Will you be reasonable, Estrella?" the man questioned impatiently. His face was white with passion rather than pain. "If you leave me as you propose doing you will create a scandal, which, for your own sake, I should imagine you would not wish. A runaway wife is always looked upon with some degree of suspicion."

The slow colour came up into her face, but the light did not die out of her eyes, neither did the line of her lips grow less firm.

"I will hide myself away—oh yes, well away—from all your friends and associates. You shall tell them what you please concerning my disappearance. Live with you as your wife I will not."

He seized her hands.

"Are you mad?" he cried, "that you are willing to relinquish all but a paltry income, scarcely sufficient to keep you in comfort? That is what you do if you leave me."

"I know what I am doing," she answered, steadily; and such firmness in one so young was strange. "I am not mad, although my wrongs might well make me so. I simply intend to go my way, with or without your consent—to leave you free to follow your inclinations, to rid you of my presence, which is so hateful to you. Surely you, least of any creature, should cavil at my conduct?"

"You are not leaving me free," he answered hoarsely, "and you know it; nothing but your death could do that."

"Then I wish with all my soul that I were

dead. I hope the day on which you get your release may be very near."

"I do not wish your death," with some slight softening of manner; "I owe you too much for that. I am not wholly ungrateful, although you believe me so. Why cannot we live as other folks do who have married as we did, for mutual convenience."

All in a moment her dark face grew ghastly. "Did you suppose I, too, lied when I promised to love, honour, and obey you. As Heaven is my witness, I held you dearer than life. I could have thanked you on my knees for the love I dreamed you gave me; I would have made any sacrifice for you that you might demand. Surely, surely you knew this? You must have known it, for I was too unskilled in art to hide my passion from you."

She suddenly ceased, and hid her face in her hands, sobbing in a terrible abandon of woe.

"Oh, my husband! Oh, my husband! how could you play so cruel a trick upon me? You should have had pity on my youth and friendlessness. You might have robbed me of all my possessions, and I would not have reproached you; but oh! you should have left my heart free!"

Duncan Reeves stood silent, conscience and heart alike upbraiding him for the part he had played towards his girl-wife.

For a little while Estrella sobbed on; then gradually regaining her composure she glanced at him through her sheltering fingers, and said,—

"I think we have no more to say to each other. I will see Mr. Lyon about this business, and then I will leave you for ever. It is better so."

"I have behaved very badly to you, Estrella, but if you will overlook my offence I swear I will do my duty by you. For Heaven's sake, let us avoid a scandal. I won't have any slur cast upon my name."

"Your name!" she cried, with indignant

scorn, "always your name! I am less than nothing to you. You do not consider me at all—only your pride, and the honour of your race."

The old, cold look marred his face once more.

"If you would but control your passion and be persuaded to listen to reason, I should be thankful," he said, icily. "It is ill-bred to be so violent."

"Am I violent?" she asked, wearily. "Well, at least I am sincere. I am no woman of the world. Oh, Heaven! I am scarcely more than a child, and have a whole long life of misery before me!"

"Why need you be miserable? You have position and wealth, are young and will probably be beautiful two or three years hence; you have full liberty to come and go as you please. I will in no way interfere with your plans and amusements. I promise never to bore you with my presence—"

"Silence!" cried the young wife. "Silence! you are aggravating your offence. Say no more. I am resolved, and to-day we part. I wish you would kiss me!" and here her voice broke pitifully. "You have never kissed me voluntarily yet, and when you come home you will find me gone."

He scarcely believed her, she was so young to defy all laws, to set him at naught. She was friendless too, an orphan, without a single relative in the world. So he laughed scornfully, and told her to be less tragic, and as the clear deep notes of his voice struck the air she shivered and sank once more upon her couch. Duncan moved towards the door.

"I shall return for luncheon," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Very well," Estrella answered, adding timorously, "You will not kiss me good-bye?"

"No. I shall hold out against you until you are more docile," and without another word he left her.

When he had gone Estrella did not indulge in tears or moans. She sat silent for a while, and then, rising, she went up to her room and began to dress with feverish haste. Her toilet completed she went out, declining the carriage, and set her face steadily towards the great city. She walked so hurriedly, and was so evidently nervous, that folks stared curiously at her. There was such grace in her movements, such growing beauty on the white sad face, that men about town accosted her, and women turned to look after her. But she was unconscious of insolence or scrutiny, as she held on her way, despair in her eyes, despair in her heart. She went down Fleet street, where the noise and traffic frightened and bewildered her; then she turned down a dingy court, and came at last to a door, on which was painted, "A. Lyon, Solicitor." She tapped nervously, and was bidden to enter by a not unkindly voice; and passing in she found herself face to face with a middle-aged man of prepossessing appearance.

"My dear Miss Moore—I beg pardon—Mrs. Reeves. What lucky chance has brought you to my den?"

"Call me by my old name," she answered swiftly. "Mr. Lyon, I have left my husband!"

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, "you can't mean this? You don't understand what you are saying; only two months married! Estrella, it is impossible. You are joking, my dear."

"Do I look like jesting?" she asked, in an unconsciously tragic tone. "I am in deadly earnest, and I come to you for help." Little by little she told her sad story to this man, her dead father's truest friend, and always her kindest adviser. He listened with darkening brows and compressed lips, and when she had finished took her poor trembling hands in his, and drew her nearer.

"You poor child!" he said huskily, "you have indeed met with rough usage, and I am powerless to help you. No man can come between husband and wife; you are irrevocably united to Duncan Reeves."

"I know, I know," Estrella interrupted impatiently, "but he will be glad to let me go my own way, provided he has his heart's desire. I want to hide myself from him, and from her, and you must help me."

"What do you propose doing?" Mr. Lyon questioned perplexedly.

"Going to Mrs. Phelps; she will take me in; she loved me always. Of course Duncan takes all the estates and rents; as he married my fortune let him keep it, I will not touch a penny."

"This is absurd, quixotic; you will repent such a step."

"No, no; the farm and cottages at Glemsdale left me by my godmother bring me in a hundred and fifty per annum—quite sufficient for my wants, and he will hardly grudge me so small a sum. You must see me off at once to Rushford, as the last train leaves Victoria at two-thirty; I examined a timetable before I came down here."

"You will repent," Mr. Lyon said again. "My dear, you scarcely know what you propose doing; by this one step you may blight your whole life."

"All night," she murmured, "all night I lay awake, trying to see some way out of my calamity, some way by which to relieve him of my continual presence in his home. And I could see none but this. Will you fail me now? If you do, I will disappear so effectually as to leave no trace by which you can discover me. Think, I shall then be not only alone, but absolutely penniless, and there will remain nothing for me but the river."

"My child, my child!" his heart sobbed for her, and at the change he saw in her; she had suddenly become a woman by virtue of her woe; there was not the least remnant of the old Estrella in her manner or speech; all the half-clinging, wholly confiding air which had made her so charming was gone now and for ever.

"He never loved me," she said drearily; "he will be glad to hear I am as one dead to him."

"But whilst you live he cannot marry another woman, Estrella."

"That is to be lamented. I wish that he were free. Oh! with all my heart I wish it! Now get ready for our journey, please, whilst I write a few last lines to him."

She hastily scribbled a few words, and placing her note in an envelope, sealed and addressed it to Duncan Reeves; then she rose and taking Mr. Lyon's arm went out with him into the noise and turmoil of the streets.

It was night when Duncan returned home, and he hoped that Estrella had become frightened at his long absence, and would be ready to listen to reason. It struck him that the house was unnaturally still, and he concluded that she had gone to bed; so he went to his favourite room, known as his "den," a bachelor-looking apartment, where none were allowed to enter save his valet and himself. On the table, placed in a most conspicuous position, was a letter, and he recognised the handwriting as his wife's. With a vague sense of alarm he tore open the envelope, and read her few and farewell words.

"Husband, I am leaving you now and for ever. You are free, in a measure, and I should be glad if my death might soon rid you of all loathsome ties. Mr. Lyon will tell you all that I have done, and if you would keep your conscience clear of murder—if you would have any claim to be called merciful—you will leave me unmolested. Should you disobey my wish I shall take refuge in suicide, far live with you again I never will. I have loved you well. I would have loved you always, but by your own act you have put me away. Killed what passion I had suffered myself to feel for you; and so, being on the threshold of life, I say good-bye to the world, and to love. Few of your friends have seen me, some perhaps do not know of my existence, and by all I shall soon be forgotten. Let all the blame be mine, I shall neither hear nor grieve over it. —ESTRELLA."

Duncan stared at the letter as though he fancied his eyesight had deceived him. He had known his young wife until to-day only in her softer moods, and he did not believe her capable of resolute or desperate action. Now she had upset all his theories in a moment, and at first he felt at a loss how to act. He was angry that she should have fled from him—angry at the nine days' scandal her flight would cause; but he saw clearly that nothing remained to him but to go to Mr. Lyon for information concerning her, and to bring her back, if that were possible.

Despite the late hour he started for the solicitor's private residence, and reached it just as the servants were making the doors fast for the night. He pleaded important business as an excuse for the lateness of his visit, and was shown at length into Mr. Lyon's study.

As he entered the elder man turned slightly in his chair, and, seeing who his late visitor was, merely bowed, and motioned him to a seat. Flashing hotly at the change in his manner towards himself, Duncan said,—

"You can guess the object of my late intrusion, Mr. Lyon?"

"Yes, you have come for news of your wife. Pray be seated, as the discussion may prove lengthy. What have you to say upon the subject?"

"This, that you know her hiding-place; and I insist you should disclose it to me. Do you suppose I am going to have my name bandied about from mouth to mouth?"

And at this point he grew irate. But the lawyer listened calmly, and when he had finished said, coolly,—

"If you will discuss the matter quietly I am willing to listen; but I won't have my household cognizant of my business, and I don't suppose my servants are more honourable than other folks. For aught I know to

the contrary they may listen at keyholes, and gossip of what they hear. I should suppose you wish Mrs. Reeves' flight to be kept secret? Well now, that being understood, what do you propose doing?"

"Bringing Estrella back to her home," Duncan answered, tersely.

"Just so. But the lady has a will of her own. What if she refuses to return? You would scarcely like to use brute force?" with a frigid glance at the young man.

"The law is on my side, sir; and I shall exercise a husband's rights—a husband's authority."

"And what about a husband's affection, sir? Are you prepared to give that?"

Duncan flushed dusky, and, seeing that, Mr. Lyon went on, ruthlessly,—

"Let us understand each other. You have treated your wife with uniform coldness. Having won her lands and her fortune you do not care to win or keep her heart, however the case may be. You neglect her, leave her lonely hour after hour, day after day; finally, you allow her to learn you have not, and never had any affection for her; in fact, that she is distasteful to you—that all the passion of which you are capable has been given to another woman. Well, sir, you have changed her from a loving, trustful child to a miserable and bitter woman; and, if you persist in knowing her hiding-place, you force her to further desperate deeds."

"By this time," Duncan said, contemptuously, "she is repenting her folly, and will be only too glad to return on my conditions."

"I doubt it. You apparently forget that from her mother she inherits all the characteristics of the Italian race—great capacities for love and hate—and what reason has she to love you? strong impulses, and probably a thirst for revenge. Let her alone. She has left you all you longed for—all for which you perjured yourself—keeping back only the little farm at Glemsdale. Give her what she so strongly desires—freedom."

"Both you and she have a convenient way of ignoring all conjugal ties. Her flight leaves me in worse condition than before. Much as I may wish, I cannot marry any other woman, although, to all intents and purposes, I shall be a bachelor."

"Allow me to remind you that I know all the circumstances of the case, and that I think you undeserving of pity. You elected your own life. Of what can you complain? You played for a high stake. You have won. Estrella's flight relieves you of the only evil in your lot. Be content."

"Well, but my name?" urged Duncan. "Confound your name," said Mr. Lyon getting really incensed; "it isn't the only one under the sun; and I have small doubt that at some not long distant period an ancestor disgraced himself in one way or another. Every family has an occasional black sheep. Why should yours prove an exception to the rule? But let me urge upon you the necessity of leaving Mrs. Reeves to follow out her own plans. If you press her too hard she will take her own life in despair."

Long they talked together, and by dint of persuasion and reasoning Mr. Lyon extracted a promise from Duncan to leave Estrella free to follow her wishes. He was to enjoy her property, to take all good and pleasant things so long as he did not molest her.

And when the door closed upon him Mr. Lyon muttered,—

"Poor child! poor child! but just caven, and all her life blighted by that scamp."

## CHAPTER II.

Why did they part? was the question that folks asked each other concerning the Reeves' separation. But no one could answer the query satisfactorily; some said "incompatibility of temper;" others that Duncan Reeves was ashamed of his youthful bride,



that he had already wearied of her unceasing, almost pathetic, devotion.

One forward damsel proposed interviewing Duncan himself, but being afraid to follow out her own suggestion it fell flat; and the hero of the story was scarcely likely to volunteer information, for there was nothing in the past that could rebound to his credit.

Rather more than two months ago he had been the possessor of a paltry three hundred a year, all his ancestral estates having gone to liquidate his father's debts.

The purchaser a stockbroker had been named Moore, who in his heart of hearts worshipped gentle birth, and felt sorry for the young man. He would have used the influence of money in behalf of Duncan, but he rejected his offers with scant courtesy, and less gratitude.

At that time Duncan had declared his love to Geraldine Swift, the beauty of the season, and she had answered that although she returned his passion marriage between them was impossible, as both were horribly poor.

He was mad with his misery, when a letter reached him from Mr. Moore, begging his immediate presence at Revestone Hall, as he was dying, and had something of importance to communicate.

Scarcely knowing what he hoped, Duncan lost no time in answering the summons, and reaching the Hall was led at once to the dying man's chamber. Here he learned that Mr. Moore had but one child, a daughter not quite seventeen, and about her future he was painfully agitated and anxious.

"She is so young and so wealthy," he said, pathetically; "some scamp of a fellow will woo her just for her fortune, and after making ducks and drakes of it, will end by breaking her heart. I think, Reeves, you are an honourable man, and would be kind to my Estrella. I know your dearest hope is to get back your estates. This you may easily do, if you will only consent to marry her."

"But my dear sir," Duncan had said, "is the young lady to have no voice in the matter?"

"Oh, she is half won already; when you were down here last autumn she often saw you, and hearing of your troubles, and the way you bore them, has made quite a hero of you. Do you close with my offer?"

"You must allow me time to think," Duncan answered, his mind in a perfect whirl. "You are asking me to take a most important step all in the dark."

"Your hesitation is creditable to you; most young men would have jumped at such a proposal as mine. Well, take time, but not too long, for a few days at most will close my life. Lyon knows of my plan, and is against it; but then he is a lawyer and must find something to quibble about."

"And when am I to see Miss Moore? Pardon me, sir, but for all I know to the contrary she may be deformed or imbecile!"

The father smiled. "You shall see her now!" and he summoned the girl at once to the room.

When Duncan saw her he could scarcely conceal his disappointment and chagrin. He detested dark women, and this little unformed girl was very dark, with hair and eyes the colour of a raven's wings; her beauty was yet in the bud, but a less prejudiced observer would have seen that one day it would be of a superb order.

The father took her slender hand in his, saying—

"This is Mr. Reeves, my child. Mr. Reeves, my daughter Estrella."

The girl bowed and answered his few questions shyly, then escaped to her own room, flattered not a little by the meeting with a man she had long exalted into a hero; and Duncan had tried to speak of her eulogistically, but he had stammered and grown incoherent in his speeches.

But Mr. Moore did not notice his strange manner; he never doubted the young man's eagerness for the match, he never dreamed

that he was laying the foundation of much woe for his darling.

The temptation was a terrible one to Duncan, but he made one effort against it. He wrote to Geraldine Swift, telling her of Mr. Moore's quixotic offer, and begging her to help him in his decision by promising to marry him on his return to town. Her answer was speedy and terse.

"There is no other course open to you. You must marry this little nobody and forget me. I dare not become the wife of a poor man."

Stung to madness by the mercenary reply, he sought Mr. Moore.

"I have come to say, sir, I agree to your proposal thankfully, always providing I am not distasteful to Miss Moore."

Then he set himself to win this innocent child's heart. It was not a difficult task, especially when one remembered she had been trained to think him a hero.

He was a man of six-and-twenty, well versed in the ways of the world; she a simple romantic girl, lacking a month of seventeen years.

He stormed and took the citadel in a very few days, and when Mr. Moore proposed he should get the special license he consented, feeling very much like a man going to execution.

When he spoke to Estrella of marrying she shrank back, frightened, pleading that she was so young, praying him to wait awhile.

But the end was very near for her father, and one day she was summoned to his room, to find her lover and a clergyman already there.

Kneeling beside the bed she plighted her troth to this man who so short a time since had been a stranger to her. She knelt down Estrella Moore, she rose Estrella Reeves.

All day her father continued to need her presence, so that she had no chance of observing her husband minutely, or she might have felt some alarm at the gloominess of his looks.

At night she sent a servant to summon him to her father's side.

Josiah Moore was almost beyond speech, but he signed to the young man to take Estrella's hand, and faintly murmured,—

"Be good to her."

They were his last words; a little later Estrella knew she was an orphan, and flinging herself upon the bed beside her father burst into wild sobs, terrible, heart-breaking moans.

Duncan had been most good to her then. He had been less than man not to be touched by her sorrow, and when he lifted her in his arms, and carried her to an adjoining room, she clung to him, sobbing out that she was all alone now, there was none left to love her save himself. He was tender and considerate, too, in the days immediately following, and she was docile as a child.

When the will had been read (and he found himself sole and undisputed successor of the Revestone estates, and a very considerable fortune besides,) he carried his bride to town, the season then being at its height.

Of course, owing to her recent loss, Estrella could take no part in the festivities; but she never complained when Duncan left her alone, hour after hour. Only on his return she would watch him wistfully, and yearn for some sign of tenderness, but none ever came. He treated her with a distant courtesy that chilled her heart, but she was afraid to remonstrate.

"Perhaps," she thought in her ignorance, "it is the way of his world, and I must try to be content; but, oh! if sometimes he would kiss me, how glad and thankful I should be!"

He came and went as he pleased, and always, as he drew near his own home, the gloom on his face darkened, because he knew, waiting very patiently for him, before her favourite window, was the woman he called wife.

Sometimes his conscience smote him for his conduct towards the hapless girl, but oftener

he regarded himself as a man sorely to be pitied—a man who had been the sport of a cruel fate.

Oh! if he were only free again! His old home might go, so long as he had a chance of winning Geraldine.

Vain regrets and vain desires made his days and nights alike wearisome. He visited all the haunts of fashion, and so, almost daily met the woman who had so enslaved him, who held him bound to her chariot-wheels, despite his marriage vows.

Folks almost forgot Estrella's very existence, or said amongst themselves there was something curious about her, as she was never visible. Was she deformed, or a natural?

At last, for very shame, Duncan elected to appear at a small dinner-party with her, and the poor child dressed herself with especial care, hoping to win some favour in his sight.

But when she ran down, robed all in heavy black silk, high at the throat, and concealing her pretty arms, with no ornament save a white flower in her hair, he looked at her with a coldly displeased glance.

So at the very beginning the child's evening was spoiled. It was a very miserable little face that met the kindly hostess's friendly eyes, and she began to regret that Geraldine Swift was to be of the party.

A big stupid man took Estrella down, and when she was seated he left her wholly to her own devices.

She began shyly to criticise the guests, and wondered a little who the woman was who sat opposite her, with Duncan on her left, and a professor on her right hand.

A tall fair woman, very beautiful to look upon, but very evil—a woman who delighted in bending men to her will, in winning hearts and casting them aside as broken toys; a woman who had no ruth, no sweet compassion, who fed her pride and vanity by doing her utmost to win other women's lovers from their allegiance.

Such was Geraldine Swift. Proud, poor, selfish, having no tenderness for any human being save herself and Duncan Reeves, and him she would not wed, because of her dread of poverty.

But she still held him in her toils; she would not, or could not, let him go.

On this particular night she was looking especially lovely, in a dress of dull red silk; her wealth of golden hair was coiled in heavy plaits on the crown of her head, and ornamented with pearl and ruby stars.

Folks often wondered how Geraldine could dress so well, being unaware that no day passed without an application from some long-suffering creditor for payment of this or that account; and how she had so long succeeded in keeping them at bay was a mystery even to herself.

She fascinated Estrella as the serpent fascinates the helpless rabbit, and presently, leaning nearer her partner, she asked timidly,—

"Who is that handsome lady; my *vis-à-vis*?"

He scarcely lifted his eyes from his plate, as he answered (wholly forgetful of Estrella's name), "Miss Swift. If you were not a *débutante* you would know Geraldine—everybody does. She is the loveliest blonde in town, and has heaps of admirers. We all thought she would marry Reeves, and I am sure he was desperately in love with her; but he has gone and married a girl whom nobody knows. I suppose her fortune tempted him."

Having said so much he "died away into silence," and again attacked his soup, altogether unconscious of his partner's sudden pallor, or the anguish in her eyes.

She was glad enough when the hostess gave the signal to rise. Geraldine's eyes were bent upon her in contemptuous scrutiny, but she was unconscious of her look.

"So," said the blonde, "that is your wife! I pity you, Duncan. She is so extremely *gauche*," and then she passed out with the other ladies.

As she swept into the drawing-room, so

proud, so beautiful and stately, Estrella's heart grew sick with envy and undefined dread. "Was it true," she asked herself sadly, "was it true Duncan had loved this woman once? If so, why had he forsaken her? Oh! Heaven forbid that her own fortune had tempted him from his allegiance. Oh!" thought the poor little simpleton, "he must have loved me to make me his wife. When we are at home I will ask him."

When the gentlemen joined them, and she sat lonely in an obscure corner, an impulse to rush away from them all seized her, and, rising, she quietly effected her escape to the large and beautiful conservatories. Seated amongst flowers and ferns, hidden well away from all, she gave herself up to many and sad thoughts. From the drawing-room came faint echoes of melody; fragments of new and popular songs, light careless laughter, and the indistinct murmur of high-bred voices. She was roused from her reverie by a woman's voice of clear and bell-like quality, but cruel withal.

"Having seen her, I am not surprised at your aversion to her. She is simply a little barbarian, black as a Moor, and as unlovely!"

"And yet, Geraldine, you counselled the marriage?" a man's voice answered, and Estrella covered her face with her hands and strove not to cry aloud, for the voice was Duncan's.

"What else could I do? Would your marriage set us more effectually apart than your poverty. You should esteem yourself a lucky man."

"Lucky! when I have lost you?" passionately. "You might spare me that taunt; it is hardly womanly to make sport of my misery."

Estrella leaned forward and peered at them through the thick-growing leaves; they were standing amongst ferns and bright-hued tropical plants that made a fitting background to this lovely woman.

Duncan's eyes dwelt passionately upon the fair, evil face, the wealth of braided hair.

"Heavens!" he said, hoarsely, "how I love you! Your beauty drives me mad! There are times when to free I could murder her."

The woman leaned nearer to him.

"You hate her?" she questioned, a gleam of malicious triumph in her turquoise eyes.

"Can I do otherwise when she stands between us? I turn with awful loathing from her. Her mere touch makes me angry."

"Pity me, pity me!" whispered the wretched listener, deep down in her breaking heart. But how should he hear, and, not hearing, why should he spare her a single pang?

"We are an ill-assorted pair—I a man of the world, she a child who should yet be in the schoolroom. She of the masses, I as far removed by birth from her as I am by my love for you, we have no taste, no wish, in common. Geraldine, it was an ill-day for both when you advised my marriage, an ill-hour when I acted upon it. Why, oh! why, if you loved me did you not risk all, poor as I was? I had influential friends who would have assisted me to something by which to increase my income."

"You know you are talking wildly, Duncan. Surely you see what an unsuitable wife I should be for a poor man! My dear, oh! my dear, I shall love you all my life; and surely now and again we shall have glimpses of happiness. Is it not happiness to meet thus?"

"No," he cried, hoarsely, "because you are not for me; because I must stand by whilst others hover near you, woo you before my very eyes."

"You have your wife to console you; I am alone," she said, coldly.

"Poor little soul!" he replied, a momentary touch of pity stirring his heart. "I wonder what she would say if she knew all, for upon my honour I believe she loves me."

The listener wrung her hands piteously, but made no moan.

"Take me back, Duncan," murmured the voice Estrella had grown in a moment to hate; "our absence will be commented upon, and your wife will be exhibiting jealousy."

"Kiss me," he demanded; and then they stood locked in each other's embrace, and Estrella heard and saw their passionate kisses.

She felt blind and sick, but still she kept silence; and long after, when Duncan went to search for her, he found her sitting, white and cold, amongst the flowers and statues.

She was very quiet during the drive home, and reaching there went at once to her room. But she did not sleep; all night she knelt in agony beside her bed, and tried to see her way clearly.

In the morning she went down pale and heavy-eyed, and then followed the interview, the result of which we know. Small wonder that, recalling all things, Duncan Reeves felt lessened in his own esteem; and yet he was glad at first that Estrella was gone. Her dark eyes would no longer haunt him with reproachful tenderness, her mere presence disgust and anger him.

She was gone from him, and there was little to remind him of the last two months. Yet how horribly still the house was! He would shut it up and go into chambers. He was exercised in his mind as to where and with whom she had hidden herself, but he could hear nothing of her. And soon he began to forget her save at odd moments, unless he thought of Geraldine; and then the shackles that bound him, weighed so heavily upon him that he almost prayed for the death of her whose generosity had so benefited him.

### CHAPTER III.

FOUR years had passed since that tragic parting in the West-end breakfast-room, and Geraldine Swift was still unmarried. Despite her birth and her beauty, men were rather chary of offering to share their all with her. She had won such a name for heartlessness and coquetry that they were inclined to "fight shy" of her; besides which, the more particular considered her manner towards Duncan Reeves a great deal too familiar, and were apt to speak pityingly of the little wife who disappeared as quickly and effectually as a comet from the sky.

The fair beautiful face of the blonde was often shadowed now by discontent, for she saw other and plainer women succeed where she failed; and she knew that in a few years at most her beauty would begin to wane, for she was now twenty-six.

Perhaps she had aimed too high. Well, now she must be content with lower game, and so she had set herself to win the liking of an Anglo-Indian of almost fabulous wealth, determined that, if need were, she would utterly separate herself from the man she loved so well, in her own queer way.

It was the beginning of the season, and all the town was on the *qui vive* to see and hear the young violinist whose *début* had been the theme of society papers for weeks past. It was said that Madame Nerulla must look to her laurels, the artiste was second only to Paganini, and all the fashionable world had obtained tickets for the classical concert at which Miss Phelps was to make her appearance. Who she was, where she came from, and whether she were beautiful or no, were questions that occupied the minds of the idle ones.

On the eve of the concert the violinist stood in her room, before a pier-glass regarding herself with critical, yet openly appreciative eyes. She turned with a brilliant smile to her companion, a white-haired lady.

"I think I shall do, auntie," she said, and her voice was "like the warble of a bird."

"You are at your best, my love; but I am frightened for you. If you should fail—if you should break down?"

"My dear, I shall not fail," in an emphatic tone. "You forget I have two thoughts to nerve me for the trial. One is that if I succeed to-night I am a made woman, can com-

mand my own terms, and make even *him* envy my fame; the other is that in my triumph lies my revenge."

Her eyes flashed as she spoke, and the rich crimson flooded her olive cheek, tinged even her ears with a rosy glow.

"Now, dear, give me my cloak; the carriage is at the door," and followed by her faithful *duenna* she went down, carrying her beloved violin with her.

The room was full; Geraldine, radiantly beautiful in sea-green, occupied a seat in the front tier; and leaning over her was Duncan Reeves, very much changed outwardly.

His thirty years had apparently weighed heavily upon him; for there were lines on the broad brow, and silver threads in the dark hair that were strange in one so young.

Geraldine lifted languid eyes to his face.

"How long before she appears?"

"Her solo is next on the programme," he said, referring to the scented paper. "Ah! here she comes! What a lovely girl!"

"I thought," Geraldine said, coldly, "you disliked dark women."

"As a rule, yes; but one must accord Miss Phelps her due."

The *débutante* bowed lowly, and then began to adjust her instrument.

Beautiful! Yes, that was the general verdict. She was dressed in trailing robes of deep orange silk. Her hair, done *à la Grec*, was guiltless of ornament, as were her throat and wrists.

She was scarcely above the medium height, but she looked taller, which, perhaps, was owing to the style of her dress.

There was an intense silence as the first notes of one of Beethoven's divinest solos sounded through the room. Upward and onward the melody floated, sometimes soft, sometimes rising, as if in a wail of despair; then came an *Allegro* movement, divinely beautiful, divinely executed, and when it closed, the girl knew by the *furore* of applause that she was a success.

As she bowed her acknowledgments again and again a smile passed over her exquisite features, and Duncan wondered of whom she reminded him, but he said very little to Geraldine. Much as he was infatuated by her, he knew it was dangerous to praise another woman overmuch to her.

The next day all London talked of the new artiste, raved of her style, her beauty, and youth. Papers prophesied a glorious career for her; men discussed her at their clubs, and women were proportionately envious of this girl, of whom it might be said, *Veni, vidi vici*.

As the season advanced she became more and more the rage; she was offered more engagements than she could accept. No concert was complete without her; soon no social gathering was voted successful if she were absent.

And so at last Duncan Reeves met her face to face. His hostess, a chatty, motherly woman, led him to Miss Phelps's chair, and having introduced them left them together.

The girl was a trifle paler than usual, but her eyes were bright, and her composure perfect.

Duncan sat down beside her, his heart beating a little faster than was its wont. He had met her so often in public that her beauty had made rather an impression upon him, and he knew now of whom she reminded him. It was of his poor little wife; although, as he said, he scarcely knew why such a thing should be. Estrella was so small, so pale, so altogether insignificant; whilst this girl's beauty was so great that none could pass her unnoticed.

Perhaps it was the trick of her smile. Estrella, he remembered, had rather a pretty smile; or it might be that her gestures were like that poor unhappy girl's. But why should he think of her to-night? Did not her memory haunt him always? Well, then, he would forget her for a few hours.

He turned towards his companion, with a slow smile lighting the depths of his dark eyes.



"You should be a happy woman, Miss Phelps? I feel it is almost presumption to imagine you can be anything else."

The sweet face framed in dusky hair was bent attentively, yet smilingly, upon him.

"I am happy," she said, in a soft voice, "I live for my art."

"And that alone satisfies you? You have no desire for anything but fame?"

"Why should I?" she questioned, slowly fanning herself; "it fills my life."

He sighed.

"I envy you!" he said, "it is well to have an object."

"And have not you?" with calm eyes fixed upon his face.

"No," bitterly; "my life is a spoiled, a purposeless one. But I am not going to inflict a recital of my woes upon you. Our acquaintance is too slight to permit such a thing, even should I wish it." Then abruptly, "Your name is English, but are you?"

"Partly; why do you ask?" and she flushed deeply.

"Because your beauty—pardon, I mean no flattery—is so very un-English. You remind me strangely of a lady I knew long since."

"Was she a great friend of yours?" Miss Phelps asked with gentle interest, and she saw Duncan pale under her words.

"She ought to have been, and I believe would have been had I but allowed it. I often reproach myself for a wrong I did her."

Her proud, beautiful lips quivered a moment, and then grew firm.

"I am sorry for her," the girl said simply, "but why did you not confess the wrong and ask pardon? Perhaps to this day she is grieved because of you."

"No, no," he answered warmly, "she parted from me in anger, vowing never to forgive me. That is four years since, and we have never met. Perhaps it is best so; for sorry as I am that I gave her pain, I cannot regret her loss."

Miss Phelps stooped to rearrange a perverse ribbon; when she lifted her head again she was quite white, but she said placidly,—

"Of course this poor soul loved you?"

"I am afraid so. But you are ill; let me do you something."

"No, no," laughing softly, "the room is hot, and heat always deprives me of my colour. Do you know, Mr. Reeves, you have recalled some words to me concerning men's faith and as they are spoken by one of your sex you will hardly complain that they are unjust. Listen."

"Our fancies are more giddy and infirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won  
Than woman's are."

Of course you deny this? That goes without saying; but you told me you did not regret your friend's loss. May I ask why? Was she not a good girl?"

"I believe so. I fancy she had all the domestic virtues in full force."

"I wonder what she is now?" musingly. "Aren't you curious to know how you have changed her, for of course she is changed?"

And then before he could reply others joined them, and he had no further chance of private speech with her. But her words haunted him all through the long sad night; and he half resolved that on the morrow he would go to Mr. Lyon, and force him to divulge Estrella's hiding-place. But when morning came he laughed at his folly, telling himself they were better—far better—apart.

If he could have seen the gifted artist in her own room he would have been not a little surprised and enlightened. She lay face downwards on the bed, sobbing in a terrible abandonment of woe.

"Oh Duncan! Duncan!" she moaned; "even to-night I would have forgiven you had you but spoken kindly of me, had you sorrowed for my sorrow. I could have forgiven and loved you. Oh! why were you so hard?"

After that night they often met, and soon

Duncan begged and obtained permission to visit her at her own home. She had given up her quiet suburban lodgings, and now rented a pretty, bijou house at Kensington, which she had made lovely after an artistic fashion of her own. Slowly it dawned upon the man that the lovely young violinist was growing too dear to him for his own peace; that, little by little, she was thrusting Geraldine from her place. He hated himself for his falseness, he cursed himself for his folly. What had he to do with love, seeing that Estrella still lived? for surely were she dead Mr. Lyon would have communicated that fact to him.

Miss Swift was not slow to see the change in her old lover, and resented it hotly. She loved him still? Why should he grow cold towards her. What woman had done her this cruel harm? She watched him carefully, and soon she was in the possession of his secret, and determined to win him back at any cost. One night she met Miss Phelps at the house of a mutual friend, and cleverly contrived to gain a few minutes' speech with her.

"Miss Phelps," she said, in her suavest tones, "I am going to take a great liberty, and I am positively afraid that I shall make you seriously angry."

"My temper is not easily ruffled; what is it you wish to say?" and she toyed carelessly with her fan.

"It is about—about Mr. Reeves. I hardly know how to approach the subject, it is such a delicate one."

The other did not attempt to help her, and Geraldine went on very incoherently; with those beautiful calm eyes upon her she felt abashed. But the purport of her story was that, having a great and friendly interest in Miss Phelps, and feeling sincerely for her somewhat isolated condition, she could not let her compromise herself without giving her some warning.

"But how," asked the girl, "am I compromising myself?"

"By accepting Mr. Duncan's very obvious attentions," growing glib again; "as a matter-of-fact, he is not a free man."

"That cannot possibly concern me. He is but a casual acquaintance; and, believe me, I am perfectly able to take care of my name."

"But if I tell you he is already married, but separated from his wife?"

"I shall answer I know it. And, pardon me, Miss Swift, considering the relations that once existed between yourself and Mr. Reeves, I must confess I think your excessive interest in him imprudent;" with which little shaft Estrella moved away.

Days lengthened into weeks, weeks to months, and now the season was drawing to a close, and Duncan began to wonder vaguely what he should do when he lost his daily sight of the violinist. She was more to him than Geraldine had ever been; he loved her with the passion of perfected manhood, and he told himself his love was a sin—an insult to her. Sometimes he wildly told his heart she was not wholly indifferent to him, and then he hated himself that for a moment he could wish her to share his misery. One night he escorted her to the Lyceum, and when they were returning he begged a flower of her—to keep in remembrance. Mrs. Phelps was apparently asleep, and both spoke in guarded whispers.

"Why should you so wish for my flowers?—they are faded."

"Give me one," he reiterated, stifled passion in his voice; "show me a little kindness to save me from madness!"

She resigned the roses and heliotrope she wore at her bosom to him; he caught her hand in his, and kissed it with fierce passion.

It seemed to her he would have spoken of love, when some sudden memory checked his speech, and, groaning, he dropped his head upon his hands. Oh! if he only dared catch her to him, hold her to his heart—the heart that would be full of her for evermore! But there was his wife; like a spectre she stood always between him and his happi-

ness, and in that moment, as once before, he wished her dead.

Mrs. Phelps invited him to enter the house with them, but he declined. That night he was scarcely his own master. As he held the girl's hand in his he felt a slight shiver run through her, and looked quickly into her beautiful, mobile face. It was white and rigid, as though death had already set his seal upon it. The sweet mouth was compressed, and the dark eyes full of unutterable longing and pain.

"Oh, Heaven!" he muttered; "this is too hard. Miss Phelps, if you can pity one so lost as I, if you can compassionate a man who has wilfully and recklessly ruined his own happiness, who is so wretched that he would gladly lay down his life here and now, pity me, and pray for me. To-night my soul is in jeopardy."

So he left her, and she crept into the house like a wounded bird.

Mrs. Phelps looked anxiously into her face, and then drew her close to her bosom.

"Ah, dear—my dear," she whispered, "you will forgive? He loves you now."

"Does he love Estrella Reeves? No, no, no; it is the fashionable and fêted artiste who has his heart—not I—not I! When he learns I am his wife he will love me no longer—a thing possessed loses all charm for him. Oh, auntie! oh auntie! how shall I bear such pain and live? I love him, I love him. Oh! to my shame, my undying shame—I love him."

She hid her face on the true heart that never failed, and never would fail her, but she did not cry or moan. She lay very still in the close clasp of the tender arms that would fain have sheltered her from every ill wind that blew.

No further speech passed between them; and when Estrella, rousing herself, prepared to go upstairs, Mrs. Phelps did not attempt to detain or console her. Perhaps she knew there was no consolation for woe like Estrella's.

In a strange dreamy way Duncan reached his chambers, and lighting his lamp sat down to brood over his calamities. He would go to Mr. Lyon and ask him to communicate with his wife, to make the following proposals in his name. He would willingly resign all pretensions to money and estates; and if she wished it, and it were possible, he would endeavour to have their marriage annulled. He was very ignorant of the law, but he had a faint idea that, as Estrella had been a minor at the date the ceremony had taken place, and had been as it were coerced, any tie between them could be dissolved.

Well, at all events, it was worth a trial. Live with her he could not, and would not, even if she desired it, and he believed her far from wishing that.

He rose, and as he did so caught sight of an envelope upon the mantel, addressed in Geraldine's handwriting. With a sick sense of loathing and impatience he tore it open and read:—

"I must see you to-morrow; I have important news for you. Something has happened which will materially affect our lives. Do not fail me, for I am very, very wretched."

"G. S."

"Confound the woman, will she never leave me in peace?" he muttered, and tore the note in fragments.

#### CHAPTER IV.

EARLY in the morning he kept his appointment with Geraldine. He was ushered into the room where she sat, less carefully dressed than was usual with her, and looking very wan in the pitiless light of the sun.

As he entered she rose, and he saw she was very painfully agitated.

"Oh! how good you are to reply so soon to my message! I am glad you have come early,

as mamma is not yet down, and we shall not be interrupted."

The prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with her did not seem to afford him much pleasure, and her jealous eyes noted this, and her heart (cold to all others) ached and throbbed with almost intolerable anguish.

"Are you not glad to be with me?" she questioned, all her passion gleaming in her eyes. "Duncan, tell me you are a little glad?"

His brows drew together in an ominous frown, but he answered gently,—

"Long ago, Geraldine, we agreed to say nothing of the mutual love which has made so many years miserable; we agreed to remember the existence of my wife."

"Be kind to me now," she pleaded, "for once forget your prudence; throw discretion to the winds. Just for one little hour let us be all in all to each other."

He thought of Estrella, and tried to picture her in Geraldine's position, but he could not. She was so pure, so good—the slightest slip seemed impossible to her. He moved uneasily.

"What news have you for me? You said something had happened which would change the current of your life."

"Last night," she answered, in a curiously sullen voice, "Mr. Goody did me the honour to propose marriage. His family, you know, is respectable, nothing more; but he has made a great fortune in India, and I believe he admires me very much."

"And what did you say, Geraldine?"

"What could I do but say yes? I am too poor to consult my heart in such a matter, and mamma's annuity dies with her."

"I wish you every happiness," Duncan said gently. He was really glad that he should at last be free of her importunity, and he hoped that her affection (like his) had cooled in its ardour.

He was very unpleasantly surprised when Geraldine, suddenly sprang to his side, and clasping her hands about his arm, cried, in a broken voice,—

"Duncan, oh! Duncan! has it come to this? Can you wish me happiness with another man? You, who have loved me! You whom I have loved with all my heart, so long, so long!"

He spoke coldly.

"Am I to blame, Geraldine? Had you not been true to yourself in the past you would now have been my beloved and honoured wife. But you were afraid of genteel poverty, and bade me do the deed which has ruined my life for all time."

She interrupted him passionately.

"I acted, as I believed, for the best. I thought only of your welfare!" A slow, cynical smile curved his lips, and seeing it, she went on more wildly. "Oh! how often have you made my heart ache of late. How often you have spoiled my days and filled my nights with torture! Have I deserved this from you? I, who have been so faithful through all these years; who have waited very patiently for a day that should dawn and find you free!"

The ill-taste of her remark jarred upon him, and he could have told her that her faithfulness had been principally due to the fact that no eligible *parti* had offered her marriage. But she was a woman, and once he had loved her—that had been in his hot youth. Well, well, let him console her if he could!

"Geraldine," and at the gentleness of his voice her face flushed with hope, "if this man who would make you his wife is so detestable to you, would it not be best to reconsider your decision? Remember, you poor soul, that in marrying Mr. Goody, you bind yourself irrevocably to him until death. No longing, no prayers, will give you back your freedom. Dear, it would be well to pause."

Now he was speaking as she wished.

"Tell me to send him away, and I will do it," she whispered, her blue eyes lifted eagerly to his.

"I dare not take such a responsibility upon

myself. Why, in a few years you would tell me I had ruined your life. No, Geraldine, I will only say that a marriage without love is like hell upon earth. Remember my hasty and ill-advised union, and take warning from it."

"I thought you would plead with me to send Mr. Goody away?"

"I have no right to do that; and even had I, why should I bid you play fast-and-loose with an honest and honourable man?"

"Because you love me!" she burst out.

Coldly but gently he set her aside; his face was very weary, and in his eyes there was a silent scorn for this weak, mercenary, unwomanly woman.

"Let it rest," he said, in a low, hard voice. "Why rake up the ashes of a dead love? Forget it, as I have striven to forget."

"But," she cried with tremulous eagerness, "you have not forgotten?" and peered into his dark face, with pain and dismay in her eyes.

"Perhaps it is foolish to say one ever forgets; but, Geraldine, I spoke nothing but the truth when I said mine is a dead love!"

Like Lancelot in Tennyson's superb idyll, he strove to kill her passion by discourtesy; and now she shrank back from him a space, her face white and drawn, her eyes tigerish, her long slim fingers twisted convulsively together. She strove vainly for speech, her breath came hard and fast; and then, all in a moment, before he could stay her she flung herself on her knees before him, and broke into dreadful, inarticulate wailing.

"Hush! hush!" he entreated, "you will be overheard;" and lifting her up in his arms he laid her upon a couch, and stood looking pitifully down upon her.

She had been the evil genius of his life; she had held him captive since early youth, and he could but grieve for her, although he saw her now as she was, and not as his fancy had painted her.

After a long, long pause, the wretched woman looked up.

"Who is the woman who has supplanted me—for whose sake you are so eager to be off with the old love?"

He made no reply, but his face flushed duskiy.

She sat erect and grasped his hand in hers. "You are throwing me over for that dark-eyed artist; but, thank Heaven, you will never marry her—so long as your wife lives I am avenged."

He held his peace; perhaps just then he dared not speak, and Geraldine, springing up, placed herself before a mirror, and for a few moments regarded her reflection steadily. Then she turned to him,—

"Why have you changed?" she asked in low, slow tones. "Am I less fair than when first we met? Has age stolen the gold from my hair, the light from my eyes? Oh! Duncan, Duncan! say you have been trifling with me?" and once again she grew passionate. "Let me be your servant, your slave—but in the name of mercy do not put me from your heart. Take me away from here—oh! for love's sake, take me away."

He was very full of pity for her then. He held her trembling hands in his and spoke gently, tenderly, to her,—

"My dear, just now you are not yourself. You don't know what you say, or you would shrink back appalled by your own words. You are hysterical, unnerved."

She broke out with a bitter laugh. "Hysterical! Unnerved! Say rather, Duncan Reeves, that I am a poor woman who has suddenly found herself forsaken; who is crying aloud to Heaven for the compassion you have refused her. False! false! to the heart's core! and I thought you so true."

"Was it just that the faith and love should be all on my side?" he asked, stung at last to anger by her reproaches, so unjustly hurled at him. "I think it wiser to leave you now before we end our long, long friendship with a deep and bitter quarrel," and he moved to

the door. But she followed him, tearful and contrite.

"Forgive me, I think I must be mad; forgive me, and kiss me good-bye." She clung about him, and would not let him go. "Duncan," she pleaded, "spare me the pain of seeing you with Miss Phelps—it would tempt me to murder you both."

"I am less than nothing to her," he answered coldly. "Do not harp upon that string; you persist in forgetting Estrella Reeves."

"Will you go back to her? It would be wiser—you would be safe from temptation."

"Great Heavens! no; and she would not receive me if I did. I don't deserve she should, seeing how I have blighted her life; and, Geraldine, you have forgotten I don't even know where she is."

"True; then you will drift further and further from me, until perhaps we shall cease to know each other—to exchange even formal greetings when we meet at this or that place. Oh, Duncan! Duncan! fate has been very cruel to us."

"No, no," he urged, with greater common sense, "we elected our own lots; it is cowardly to shift the blame from our own shoulders. After all, a man is the commander of his own fate to a certain extent."

He heard her mother's step upon the stairs and prepared to leave her. She whispered hurriedly,—

"Miss Phelps knows of your unhappy union. If she is a good woman she will have nothing to say to you."

"Did you tell her of this?"

"No; are you going? Good-bye; oh, love, love, good-bye!" and then aloud for Mrs. Swift's benefit,—

"Thank you so much for your hearty congratulations. I was sure you would be glad to hear of my happiness."

Two minutes later he was out in the sunny street; but upstairs, upon her bed, a woman lay moaning and sobbing out his name, crying out that life was too hard, too hard!

Duncan went at once in the direction of Palace Gardens, where Miss Phelps resided; his heart was full of conflicting passions, his brain busy with many thoughts. But above all his natural pity for Geraldine; above all the anguish and the longing which made his life hard to be borne, was the one desire to be near her for a little while before he said good-bye to her for ever.

A strange yearning to tell her all his miserable story, not excusing himself in anything, nor toning down his sin until it seemed a venial error, but to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, and throw himself upon her mercy. Strange that as he went to meet this girl who had so stolen away his heart, his thoughts should so often revert to his girl-wife.

Again, in fancy he heard her soft, sad voice, saw the sweet, melancholy smile on the pale young face; and he felt keener shame, keener regret, for the part he had played, than in the first hours of their separation.

"Poor little soul!" he said, again and again "I believe that she loved me, and if she should continue faithful to me her life must be a misery to her; though how could it be otherwise, for whilst I live she is bound to me and may not give a thought to any other?"

He reached his destination at last; and was at once shown into the breakfast-room where Estrella and Mrs. Phelps were sitting. He thought the girl had never looked so lovely! She wore a morning gown of peach-coloured cambric embroidered with flowers of a darker shade; delicate laces were about her throat and wrists; and the luxuriant hair was gathered into one careless knot, falling low upon the neck. She blushed a little when Duncan was announced, but met him with the greatest *cœur froid*. He took a chair, and sat down beside her.

"Miss Phelps," he said, "I have come to make a confession."

She smiled brightly up at him.

"Is it a very serious one?"



"Yes," and the gloom on his brow darkened; "and I would make it to none other than yourself. You shall absolve or condemn me."

Mrs. Phelps rose to leave them, but Estrella stayed her by a look.

"What Mr. Reeves may wish to say to me cannot remain a secret to you."

Duncan had scarcely bargained for the presence of a third, but he saw at a glance that the young artiste had her reputation to maintain, and in his heart approved her wisdom.

Mrs. Phelps sat down at a distant window, and Duncan drew his chair nearer to the girl.

"I am afraid," he said suddenly, "I am going to surprise you very much. What would you say if I told you I am a married man?"

"That I knew this long ago," she answered quietly, but her lips were tremulous, and the colour died a little out of her face. In his soul he cursed himself, fearing he had brought grief to her.

"And where is she?" questioned the girl, after a momentary pause.

"I do not know," he replied, stricken with shame, and afraid to meet the look of those pure young eyes. "We parted four years since."

"Was she a bad woman that you cast her off?"

"No; she was a gentle, innocent creature, and I was a brute!"

"Why did you part?" How low her voice had grown!

"I did not love her; and she discovered that when we had been married something less than two months."

"Poor soul! poor soul! Have you never thought she may be dead? Have you never wished it?"

"Heaven forgive me! sometimes I have!" He glanced at her then.

Her face was ghastly and pinched, her eyes blazed like stars.

"You are sorry for her—for my poor little wife?"

"Yes, oh, yes! my heart bleeds for her! my heart bleeds for her!"

"Have you no pity for me?" he questioned, brokenly and timidly.

She glanced at him a moment and then answered more firmly than she had yet spoken.

"Yes; I am sorry for you, but in a less degree. She has lost her all; you have lost but one friend among many! Ah, poor child! how your coldness bruised her heart! perhaps changed all her good to evil, made her old whilst yet she was young! But why, if you were so indifferent to her, did you marry her?"

"Let me tell you my story from the beginning, and when you know all try and put yourself in my place, and do not blame me too severely for my mercenary action, my harshness to that poor child!"

Word by word he related the story Estrella knew so well—not sparing himself, not seeking to hide anything that he had done in the past four years.

He leaned over the girl as he spoke, and saw her colour come and go fitfully, her hands clasp and unclasp nervously; and he said,—

"Tell me what am I to do?"

"It was Mrs. Phelps that spoke,—

"Seek out your wife and pray her forgiveness. Strive by tenderness and devotion to teach her forgetfulness of the past four years!"

"But, madam!" he cried, blankly, "the thought of a lifetime spent with her appals me. She is such a little unformed thing!"

"Say was! You forget how long a time has past since you saw her."

"The thing you suggest is impossible. Miss Phelps, you tell me what I am to do!" and then their eyes met, and in hers he read no hope for himself.

"I am not competent to advise you," she

answered, in soft, cold tones; "but it seems to me you should do your best to atone for your error!"

He bent so low, and spoke so softly, that she alone could hear his words,—

"Miss Phelps, you have not heard all. I love another woman with all my heart and life!"

"I know this, too. She is named Geraldine Swift."

"No, no!" he interrupted, "you are mistaken! Oh, look at me, listen to me one moment! I will find my wife, and discover whether or no I can give her the release we both crave—she as well as I. And if the law grants us this boon, I will go to the woman I love—the hem of whose skirts I am not worthy to touch—and pray her to listen to me, to trust her life to my keeping!"

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" Estrella said, and her voice had a ring of scorn.

"But if they are best apart? If the law allows their separation?"

"Why, then the woman who is your second choice must act according to her conscience."

"Try to imagine yourself in her place. What would you do?"

"I would say to you, go back to the woman Heaven holds your wife; aye, though I died of love for you, I would not marry you in such a case!"

He rose, pale of lip and brow, but outwardly calm.

"I am answered," he said, heavily, "and being a good woman and pure I am fain to trust to your judgment. I think I shall be leaving England soon. If I decide to do so, may I come once more to say good-bye?" He was holding her hand in his, looking into her eyes.

"Come!" was all she said, and then her voice failed her utterly.

When he was alone he set his face towards the city.

"Now for Lync," he thought; "he shall tell me if Estrella is alive or dead!"

## CHAPTER V.

Mr. Lyon was unfeignedly surprised when Duncan Reeves walked into his office, and demanded to know where his wife was hidden. This was a turn in affairs he had not anticipated, and he said,—

"If you suppose that I shall put you in the way of persecuting that poor child you are mistaken."

"Then she is alive?" and his heart sank within him.

"Most certainly—alive and well, and lovely as a dream. Now why do you wish to see her? Have you come to your senses at last, young man? I must say you've been rather long about it."

"You are mistaken in your supposition. Even did I wish it, Mrs. Reeves would refuse to return to me. But I am as far from wishing it as she is. I want to consult her, however, on a matter of importance. I would suggest, if such a thing is possible, that our marriage should be annulled."

"That you may marry Miss Swift, I suppose?" Mr. Lyon said, coldly.

"Miss Swift is engaged, I believe, to Mr. Goody. You are rather wide of the mark. But as you are my wife's solicitor, and her chosen champion, perhaps it would be best to tell you all."

"It certainly would," dryly; "as all communications from you must reach her through me. Of course there is a lady you are desirous of putting in her place? Have you forgotten you owe all your present prosperity to Mrs. Reeves?"

"I am scarcely likely to do that; and of course I know I must relinquish all claim to the estates. But I am not afraid to work. And I believe the woman I love would help me to begin my new life. She is the noblest and best of her sex."

"Of course; that goes without saying," Mr. Lyon remarked, coldly. "Is it impertinent to inquire this paragon's name?"

Duncan flushed dusky, but strove not to take offence at the lawyer's tone and manner.

"Understand," he said; "I do not even feel assured that I am more to her than another man (I hope you believe I would not pay court to any woman under my peculiar circumstances). The lady is Miss Phelps, the new violinist."

To his intense surprise and disgust Mr. Lyon leaned back in his chair, and gave vent to a prolonged fit of laughter.

"Oh! dear," he said, recovering his breath and a semblance of composure; "this is too good. My dear fellow, it's useless to fly in a passion, you must bear with me awhile. I must laugh! It is the best joke of the season! Oh! oh! Oh! by Jove, Reeves, you don't mean it!"

Duncan took up his hat.

"When you have recovered your senses, sir, I will see you again. Early as it is, I am inclined to think you have been drinking."

"Stay, Mr. Reeves. If you listen to me a moment you will hardly wonder at my laughter. Things are just as they should be. *You have fallen in love with your own wife!*"

He laughed again as he saw Duncan's startled face and incredulous eyes.

"That staggers you. Ah! well it may! The girl you despised and disliked as Estrella Reeves you love as Estrella Phelps. We men are a curious breed! We despise what we have and long for what we have not. What are you going to do now? Shall you try to annul the marriage?" and he went off with another cachinnation.

"Mr. Lyon, for Heaven's sake, say you are jesting! If she is indeed my wife she will never forgive me. I was brutal to her."

"I quite agree with you. But women are such curious cattle, the more there is to forgive the better they love one. If you want to worm yourself into a woman's affections, do something very wrong and then play at penitence. That is my experience of the sex as learned professionally—not personally."

"But," said Duncan, still bewildered, "Estrella was a little dark creature, pale, unformed, unlovely!"

"She was a child when you married her, she is a woman now. Even at sixteen she gave promise of great beauty. She has fulfilled it. Now, once again, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know; I am bewildered. I hardly realise yet what you have told me. Mr. Lyon, I have no hope. By my own act I have cut myself off from her. Sometimes she reminded me of my wife. But she is so gloriously lovely, so talented. I was not even aware Estrella was musical."

"Because you never troubled yourself to learn anything about her. I suppose she inherited her talent from her mother. She was an Italian, as you know, and a violinist, as perhaps you did not know. From her earliest years Estrella had a penchant for the instrument. And when your harshness drove her to a desperate step, she placed herself under great masters, and devoted herself, heart and soul, to her art, intending by her own efforts to make herself famous, and nobly has she succeeded."

The lawyer had grown grave now. He laid his hand upon Duncan's shoulders, and looked steadily into his eyes.

"I believe you mean well and honestly, and I wish you good-luck. If I may presume to advise, I should say, go to Estrella at once and plead your own cause. Make her listen to you. My boy! this is as it should be, and let all your after-life prove the sincerity of your remorse and your love."

"But, sir—if she will not forgive?"

"Tush! Don't attempt anything with a faint heart, or you will fail," and he gently pushed Duncan from the office. "Carry my love to Estrella, and tell her to be good."

Out in the street, Duncan paused and en-

deavoured to regain something of his lost composure, some clearness of thought.

His heart beat fast and hard. Perhaps in all his life he had never been so agitated or so fearful.

He had sinned so sorely against Estrella that he dared hardly hope for forgiveness, and still less dared he believe that she could ever feel any tenderness for him. And he loved her so passionately; life without her now would be a terrible thing.

Well, he would go to her; he would plead humbly and earnestly for pardon and love. He would think no sacrifice too hard, no labour that she might impose too great, to prove his sincerity.

He did not forget, for a moment that he had no longer a helpless, trustful child to deal with; but a much wronged woman; who had learned self-confidence in a very hard and bitter school.

He had done his best to break her heart and spoil her life. He had trampled her love and tenderness ruthlessly under foot. He had given her a very bitter cup to drink—had had no pity upon her youth, her loneliness.

No, there could be no hope for him. And with that thought he went miserably to his chambers.

But the following morning he rose in a brighter mood; and, dressing carefully, started for Estrella's residence. To his joy he found her sitting alone, Mrs. Phelps being confined to her room with a severe headache.

The girl rose as he entered; she was somewhat paler than usual, a little colder and prouder in manner; but she gave him her hand. He held it close and fast, although she strove to withdraw it from his clasp.

"Estrella!" he said, hoarsely; and then she knew he had learned all.

Every vestige of colour left the beautiful face, and into the dark eyes came a look of indomitable pride, and gathering coldness. In that moment she looked strangely like the girl-wife who had said so passionately—"I will never forgive you!"

His heart began to fail him, but he would not let her go without a struggle.

"Wife, wife!" he said; "it was but yesterday I learned the truth, the blessed truth, which gives me the woman I love for my own. Estrella, my darling heart, is it quite impossible to forgive the wrong I did you long ago? Dear, I sinned and lost you. Now bid me do whatever penance you can devise if only in the end I may claim you, hold you mine for all time. Punish me as you will, but let me hope—sweet, and dear—let me hope!"

She wrenched her hand from his then, and faced him, stern as an accusing angel.

"Duncan Reeves," she said, "it is not your wife you love, but another; and how shall I tell that you will not weary of the new love as you did of the old? When my beauty and the novelty of my presence had worn away, what would hold your fickle heart to me? Long ago by your own act, you worked out our separation. I left you broken-hearted—I freely gave up all that was mine by inheritance. I never troubled your peace—I was as one dead to you. Why have you recalled me to life? How dare you ask me for love and pity, you who had neither for me—for the helpless, lonely child who had believed in you, loved you, worshipped you?"

"I had none," he answered, brokenly; "but I repent. What can a man do further? You will say my repentance is a mere empty form of words. Try me, judge me by my actions."

"If you had treated me kindly and considerately in the past," she said, "there would be no need now to plead with me. I should have been your slave. I should have clung to you in and through all; but you would not have this."

"Remember," he urged, "all that you promised me beside your father's bed; and only yesterday you quoted for my benefit the words, 'Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'"

"I know, I know," wildly; "but you yourself made our marriage null and void. Oh! do not delude yourself with the belief that I ever can, or ever will forgive."

"Think of what my life will be without you," he urged, desperately. "Think of what the years will be, cut off from love and all good things."

"I have chosen my lot, I shall not shrink from it. As for you, well, you have worked your own undoing. Yet this is the hour I longed for—the hour of your defeat and my triumph. I shall look back to it through all the long years to come and find consolation in it."

"You are sorely unforgiving," he said in a heartbroken way, and his eyes dwelt miserably upon the sweet, proud face.

"I am what you have made me," she answered, icily. "Why do you complain of your handiwork? Oh, once—it is so long since I almost distrust my own memory—once I was a simple, loving child—so proud to be your chosen wife, so glad in your affection, so sure and so exultant in your integrity and truth, that I fancied myself blessed above all others of my sex. The awakening was very bitter; all my passion was thrown scornfully back upon me, all my trust shaken, and my pride outraged. Oh! how changed I am! With what different eyes I see you now. Duncan! Duncan! you were very cruel to me," and then her voice was shaken and piteous.

He thought she was relenting and broke out eagerly,—

"Estrella, whatever you may say to the contrary I believe you love me still."

She regained her haughty manner at once. "Have you yet to learn one often despises the creature one loves? I weighed you in the balance and found you wanting. Be content with my decision; it will never change. Do you suppose for an instant that I would share your affection with such a woman as Geraldine Swift?"

"She is less than nothing to me now."

"As I should be in the course of a few years; being unattainable you long for me. Surely I have said enough to prove that between us there can be no union, no forgiveness?"

"I still cling to my forlorn hope, Estrella; you will scarcely blame me for that. Oh, wife! my darling wife! with you beside me I would make my life worthier and better. I would labour to win your approval, to crown you with honours. Don't cast me aside when most I feel my need of you. Love! love! can you find no kind word to say?"

A spasm of pain twitched about her mouth, but her manner lost nothing of its firmness.

"I can and do send you away, because I cannot trust you or forgive."

"To err is human, to forgive divine."

"Some sins are beyond pardon," she answered coldly. "You are but prolonging your own pain, and forcing me to say harsh things. Why will you not accept 'no' as my answer to your entreaties? I wish, for your sake, I may be cut off in the midst of my youth and my fame. I should be glad to feel that you were free. A man's wounds heal so quickly, one love succeeds another so soon. It is only women who are faithful even when heart and sense alike rebel against such constancy."

Then there was silence between them for awhile—silence so profound that she could hear his deep-drawn breaths. She felt mad with her misery, but her pride sustained her even then, and she shed no tear, made no moan.

"Good-bye," he said at last, in a changed and husky voice. "I shall trouble you no more. You are a sweet and good woman, but you lack one virtue. Were you merciful you would be perfect. But I do not seek to reproach you. Heaven knows I have small right to do that; if you could have forgotten, if you could have trusted me, I should have thanked you all my life long. But you have chosen. Well, let us part, and as I am leaving you for ever, as the mere fact that I am your husband

allows me some privilege, I pray you let me kiss you once."

Just so had she pleaded to him once, and he had denied her one caress. Did she remember if now?

If so she made no sign, as she lifted her face to meet his. He felt her warm soft breath fluttering amongst his waving hair, and as he drew her close in the last passionate, hopeless farewell, he felt her heart beating upon his, and broke into a bitter groan, realising in a flash all that he had lost, all that he must yearn for with such terrible sick longing through the dreary days before him.

He rained wild kisses on her throat, her cheeks, her lips; then with sudden remembrance, he put her gently away.

"Good-bye," he said again; "may your life be as bright as mine is dark; may you never regret this hour or this hour's work. Oh! love! love! love! I wonder will you ever relent?"

She could not bear to see the awful anguish in his eyes, the hopeless expression on his handsome face; she put up her hands as if to shut out the sight. He moved to the door and then he paused, and looked back as one looks on the faces of the dear dead; such despair—such longing in his glance as might well melt her woman's heart. Then he went out and shut the door behind him.

Estrella lay silent upon the couch, listening to the hurrying steps of passers-by, trying vainly to distinguish his from amongst them.

Slowly, heavily, he went back to his chambers, locking the door upon intruders. He took his life in his hands and faced it in all its hideous loneliness and lovelessness; he did not shrink or cry out with horror, as he saw each day darker, more dreary than its predecessor.

He excused nothing in his past, he hoped for nothing in the future. Well then, let him do what he could to make some other lives brighter, better, happier, something that would purify his name to her, that would incline her to think more pitifully of his wrong-doing.

Adversity was doing for him what prosperity had failed to do. It was refining his dross, bringing out whatever dormant good there had been in him. Heaven knows his thirty years had been worse than wasted; but Heaven is merciful, and although Duncan did not hope it, there were good times yet in store for him.

Left to herself, Estrella had broken into wild wallings and tears; she had cried until her strength was spent, and her head ached so madly it was pain to think.

In the evening Mr. Lyon visited her.

"I have seen Reeves," he said abruptly, and a faint flush stained the pallor of her face. She made no answer and he went on. "Were you mad to send him away hopeless?"

"No; I only did not forget," she answered, wearily.

"You must be mad, or your fame is spoiling you. He is your husband, and you should let bygones be bygones."

"It is useless to plead for him. My resolve is a fixed one," and she would say no more.

## CHAPTER VI.

ALL the fashionable world was electrified when it heard that Duncan Reeves had given the whole of his splendid fortune up to his wife, had removed from his chambers, and was subsisting somewhere on his original income of three hundred per annum.

Speculations were rife as to where his wife was hidden, and what had caused this sudden quixotic action on his part.

The malicious said that for four years he had been unjustly using and enjoying her property, but now, having attained her majority, she was asserting her rights.

No one guessed the truth, not even Estrella herself; she supposed at first he had left England for a time, and was not a little surprised when Mr. Lyon told her he was still in town.



"I wish to hear nothing," she said coldly; "we are dead to each other."

"One day," the lawyer said, "you will be sorry for and ashamed of your conduct; it is unchristian and unwomanly."

"Then even you turn against me! Are you all on his side?"

"I don't believe in kicking a man when he's down; that is not English."

"It never struck me that you were partial to Mr. Reeves," she remarked, ignoring his last words; "this is a new experience."

"My dear girl, I had as fine a contempt for him as even you could wish, but lately my opinions have become modified concerning him, and I maintain you are using him very ill."

"Have I not been used ill?" she questioned, in a suppressed tone.

"I'm not going to deny that, but now you have the chance of happiness you throw it aside to gratify your pride. To my mind you were vastly nicer when you were a little unformed thing than you are now. You were hot-tempered, it is true, but generous and quick to forgive. It strikes me forcibly you are being spoiled by your success; you are growing hard, and sorely unforgiving."

"Perhaps I am," she answered wearily, "but you who know my story should not blame me overmuch. Oh! Mr. Lyon I loved him once above and beyond all creatures. I made him my idol, and fell down and worshipped him. I would not see the feet of clay, I would not heed little signs and tokens, which went to prove him like other men. If he had demanded my life I should have given it freely, glad to do him service; but he killed all that was good in me, and now if I would forgive, I could not. Oh! friend, dear old friend, is not my case pitiable? Am I to bear all the blame, and to have all the commiseration? It is not just—it is not just."

He did not attempt to reason with her; he was sorry for, but impatient with her, and was glad when the season closed, and she left town to fulfil a round of provincial engagements.

Meantime, where was Duncan Reeves?

He had taken apartments in that unsavoury region known as Whitechapel, and began a good work among the thronging poor.

He was not a religious man, and he had been fastidious; but he wanted work, and one long day spent in this neighbourhood had opened his eyes to the manifold wants and distresses of his poorer brethren. Here, amongst them, the scholar and the gentleman would hide away from all who had known him, would fill his days with labour, and perhaps be not altogether unhappy. He began to visit from house to house, and gradually the *braguette* with which he had been greeted at first wore away; he was no longer regarded with suspicion, and went in and out the houses as he pleased. He had a word of kindly advice always ready; a word of warning for the unwary. He bade them see in him a man who had wantonly wrecked his own life; he was always ready to share his income with them, to help them with their burdens. His dark, worn face grew familiar to the denizens of noisome courts and alleys, his kindly voice the only music heard there.

He was often weary, often sick at heart, but they never knew this, never heard him complain.

There were times when he was mad with his love and misery, when it seemed so useless to struggle against fate that he was inclined to throw down his arms in despair. But if his days were dark his nights were infinitely worse. Shut up in his own room he would sit brooding over the fire, seeing in the glowing embers visions of what might have been; or he would pore over a book from whose pages Estrella's face looked up at him, dark with passion and pain and indomitable pride. Then he would turn away with a groaning, and stretching out his arms murmur her name in a terrible, heartbroken way. He was so hopeless of winning her to him, of

touching that proud spirit to pity. And when the lights were out, and he lay tossing on his bed, she came and stood beside him, stern and silent, an accusing angel, with loveliest, proudest face. Even his dreams were haunted by her, and had one listened one would have heard him mutter often in his broken sleep "Oh, wife! wife!" in the accents of one who has foregone hope.

Autumn and winter passed, and spring came; since his voluntary flight from old scenes, old friends, old associations, he had never ventured into the more aristocratic parts of the city—the old ways would seem strange to him now.

He heard from Mr. Lyon, who occasionally visited him, that Estrella had returned, and the longing to see her again came upon him with overwhelming force.

One night he walked in the direction of her house—the old one—for she had refused to publish her marriage, or take possession of the home he had prepared for her long ago.

He had hoped to catch a glimpse of her beautiful face, but he was disappointed bitterly. The blinds were all drawn, and he could hear the sound of music and laughter, but he could not distinguish her voice.

The following night he was there again, and this time he was more fortunate. Just as he reached the house the door opened, and Estrella, followed by Mrs. Phelps, came out, dressed for a concert. She passed him so closely that her skirts almost brushed him, and her voice, low and soft, said,—

"I must excel myself to-night, as Royalty will be present."

Then she stepped into the carriage and was driven away, so unconscious of his presence, so seemingly careless of his love, that he began to believe her happy.

Often and often after that he was near her at night, breathing her name so lowly that none but himself could hear the soft, sweet word.

Long, long afterwards, when she heard the tale of his woes, she hated herself for her harshness and pride, and the glory of her eyes was dimmed by tears she shed for him. But now how could she guess that his love was around and about her as a mantle; that for her sake he bore his burden day after day, never fainting, never failing, so long as his physical strength endured.

And so, in this wise, another year passed, another season began, and Mr. Lyon saw with grave anxiety that Duncan's face grew daily more wan, his step more slow, and he said angrily to himself, "He is simply dying for love of her," and forgot that men do not die of love.

"Estrella, I want to have five minutes' chat with you," said Mr. Lyon, walking into her pretty breakfast-room one morning.

"You may have fifty if you choose. I am quite at liberty for three hours to come. Why, you look as grave as a judge. What has happened? Are you going to be married? Am I to wish you happiness?"

She had acquired a certain flippant way of jesting of late, and it jarred upon the lawyer horribly; so he said, sharply,—

"If you can give me grave and close attention for a few minutes I shall be glad; I came to speak of Duncan Reeves."

She interrupted him swiftly,—

"That is a tabooed subject."

"I am well aware of that," coolly; "and I know, too, you are only accustomed to compliments and flattery. Well, I am going to administer a wholesome tonic, for I shall speak plainly, as your father would have done had he lived."

Something in his manner compelled her to obey, and she sat down with lightly folded hands, listening with apparent calmness as he told the story of Duncan's life and Duncan's work. She could not help feeling a little glad in him; but pride prevented her showing this; and when Mr. Lyon paused, she said,—

"And what does all this amount to? What

does it prove? Did he engage you as his ambassador? If so, go back and say that he has not furthered his cause by so doing."

"You are as obstinate as a mule, as cruel as a Borgia, as proud as Lucifer. I am disgusted with, and disappointed in you. I believed you to be kind and womanly—"

"Sir," she interrupted, "spare yourself the trouble of reasoning with me. You should remember," smiling coldly, "the old saying:—

"'He that complies against his will,  
Is of his own opinion still.'"

Mr. Lyon frowned upon her.

"Pray hear me to the end, and then have me ejected if you will. It is good policy to cut yourself off from old and tried friends."

"I will not interrupt again," she answered, carelessly, and sat looking from the window; and Mr. Lyon, in his turn, looked at her curiously.

"I suppose," he said, "if Mr. Reeves were ill—dying—you would carry your animosity still further, and refuse to go to him?"

"Why will you suppose such things? Please come to the point."

"That is what I intend doing. I have come in your husband's interests, and I can hardly believe you will be so unwomanly as to hold out longer when you have heard all. A fortnight since his philanthropy had carried him in the direction of the docks. He was walking along buried in thought, when he heard a sudden splash, followed by shouts, and, turning hastily, saw a woman struggling in the water. The people on the bank seemed paralysed by fear, and had he not plunged in after her she must have been drowned. Well," with a queer glance at Estrella, "I suppose his heroism counts for nothing? The woman was only a poor unfortunate whom nobody cared about, and who had thrown herself in, in the hope of getting rid of her troubles. With great difficulty Duncan succeeded in drawing her to the bank, and being assisted there himself lay long in a swoon. He had been ailing some weeks, and had been advised to take some rest—had even been warned that his life was in danger. But why should he care to live? He had few friends; his wife wished for freedom, he was weary and heart-sick, and so he had disregarded the advice."

The colour left Estrella's face, and the proud lips had grown tremulous. Suddenly she turned, and her eyes full of love and pain met Mr. Lyon's. But he had a mission to accomplish, and went on ruthlessly,—

"Well, he returned to his lodgings—poor apartments in Whitechapel—he who had been used to luxury always. And then—well, then a fever ensued, and no friend was near him. The poor women of the neighbourhood vied with each other in attending him, but they were ignorant, and so—"

"Oh, do not add *he died!*" Estrella cried suddenly, in an awful voice. "Oh, kind friend, oh dear friend! have some pity upon me! I love him, I love him! Oh, take me to him! If he is dead, Heaven will not forgive me my cruelty. Oh! you cannot tell how hard I have been—and yet through all I have longed for him, have loved him?" She fell on her knees beside her friend, and hid her face from him.

"Estrella," he said gently, "I am here to take you to him. You have been cruel, but I will not reproach you now. Get your hat and come with me. The fever has left him, child; but the medical men say unless something occurs to rouse him from his lethargy his days are numbered."

"Oh! take me to him," she sobbed. "I have been sorely unforgiving; but he is good, and perhaps will find it in his heart to pity me."

It was growing dark when they entered the house and groped their way up the narrow stairs; on the landing Estrella stumbled over a dark object. It proved to be a boy, who, sitting erect, sobbed out,—

"Oh, let me—let me be! I can't go away till I know he's better. Oh, Heaven! oh, Heaven! he's the only friend I've got, and they say he's dyin'! Let me see him just a minute, mum, only a little minute; he was kind to me when nobody else gave me anythin' but kicks and curses."

"Hush, hush, my boy!" said Mr. Lyon, imperatively. "You will disturb him; come, be brave, and you shall see him soon. This lady has come to nurse him back to health."

Then he opened the door, and Estrella went in alone. A moment she stood looking on the still form upon the bed—the pale, worn face, paler by contrast with the dark hair and lashes. Then she moved forward, an awful fear tearing at her heart.

"Duncan," she murmured, "Duncan, my love, my husband!"

Slowly the heavy lids uplifted, the dark grey eyes rested upon her, then a faint voice said,—

"Oh, my darling—my darling! you have come at last!"

In a moment he was in her arms, clasped close and fast, whilst her tears fell on his pallid face, but they were tears of thankfulness and joy.

Did Duncan live? And if so, was he happy?

Read an extract from a letter to Mr. Lyon, written long afterwards:

"This present joy is worth all past pain. My wife is an angel, and I wonder often at the blindness which made me turn from her, and cling to a worthless woman. We are happy in our present mode of life, and our home for destitute women and children goes on famously. Come down and see it, and us. If you reach here by the ninth you will be in time for the christening. The little one is to be called 'Douglas Lyon.'—Yours always,

"DUNCAN REEVES."

[THE END.]

## FACTS.

A MAN may be ashamed of the fashion of his nose, although he follows it.

CUSTOMER: "Give me a dozen fried oysters." Waiter: "Sorry, sir, but we're all out o' shell-fish, 'ceptin' eggs."

A RECIPE for a lemon pudding vaguely adds, "Then sit on a hot stove and stir constantly."

WHEN one "man wants but little here below," three others are in hailing distance who want the earth.

"You've eaten next to nothing," Hoped Smithers, who was dining with his girl, "Oh, I always do that when I sit by you," responded the young lady, pleasantly.

WHEN you drive past a big house in the country, and see a lot of people waving their hands and dancing around the verandah, do not think it is an insane asylum; it is only a summer hotel, with the boarders going through the fly drill.

The boy said he thought his parents intended to move, but he had not heard anything about it. He was asked for the reason of his opinion, and replied that he had noticed that his father had begun to empty ashes upon the cellar floor, and they generally moved soon after that.

HE (to absent-minded woman): "I have just been to Mrs. Smith's funeral with my wife." She: "Which one?" He: "I've only got one, thank you." She: "Oh, I see. How is Mrs. Smith?" He: "Why, she's dead." She: "Oh, yes. Was she ill long?" He: "Only a week." She: "Was it serious?" Exit he.

A MAN who has a scolding wife says he is going through the journey of life by rail.

A HOTEL should never advertise that "it stands without arrival."

THERE is just as much craft upon the land as there is upon the sea.

IT is said that the spring time makes the skylark soar. This must be painful to the poor skylark.

A YOUNG man asks: "How can I gain a copious flow of language?" We would suggest that he should try sitting down on a tack.

PATERFAMILIAS:—"My boy, I shall have to punish you for breaking this vase." Sister Nell: "He didn't break it, papa!" Paterfamilias: "How do you know?" Sister Nell (triumphantly): "I saw him didn't!"

"Who's that lady?" "Oh, that is General B.'s wife." "That can't be. She's just whispered in his ear, and then the two exchanged a smile." "Ah! but you must know that she was originally a country girl, and is still a little old-fashioned in her ways."

WHY WE STUDY.—"For what do we study?" asked the school-teacher, as the class stood before him. There was silence, for most boys can't see any use in studying, anyhow. Then the editor's little boy, who was one of the class, recollecting the motto at the head of his father's paper, raised his hand and shouted: "I know. We study to please."

"DARLING," said a young clerk to a pretty girl whose waist his arm encircled, "what do you think your dear papa would say if I were to ask him for your hand?" "I don't think he'd like it, Harry," she lisped. "No?" he said, in dismay, for he thought he was very dense with the old gentleman. "Why not?" "Because, dear," she smiled, "he wouldn't want his only daughter mutilated in that manner. Ask for all of me, Harry, and I have a vague suspicion you'll get me mighty quick." Harry gave her a squeeze as big as an anaconda, and saw the father, next day, in a most successful manner.

THEY WOULD TARTER.—"Five pounds to the man who can prove that any two things put into this ice-chest will taste of the other!" He had a refrigerator run out to the curbstone, hung the above sign over each side, and retired indoors to await the expected run of customers. People passing up and down the street jostled each other in their hurry, glanced at the ice-box and its sign, and went on. After some hours of disappointed hopes and expectations, the dealer saw a pedestrian halt, calmly peruse the wonderful announcement, and rather hesitatingly advance to the door. "Do you mean it?" he inquired, in an anxious tone, pointing over his shoulder to the sign. "Yes, sir," emphatically responded the dealer. "Put up your money?" insinuated the stranger. "No, sir!" replied the dealer, in a pompous style. "My word is as good as the cash." "All right, I'll take you," responded the stranger, as he departed. He returned shortly after with a box under each arm. "Stick to your agreement?" he queried. "Of course I will!" answered the dealer, wondering what in the name of Christopher Columbus the name had in view. The stranger set his box down on the pavement, and a crowd began to collect. He told the dealer that he was afraid he (the dealer) would back out of his bargain, but the latter asserted his readiness to put up the money if necessary. The stranger opened a box, lifted out a cat and placed her in the refrigerator. Then he opened the other box and took therefrom a wire cage containing a large rat. "Now mister," said he, "you just shut that door in a hurry when I flop the rat inside and I'll go you another five that one will taste of the other in less than five minutes." The crowd yelled and the dealer slammed the refrigerator door and slid into the shop with a remark about fools and swindlers. He still refuses to recognize the stranger's claim to the £5, but has taken his sign in.

A HOME RULER: the broomstick.

A MAN must not expect to live in clover simply because he marries a grass widow.

LITTLE JACK: "My mamma's new fan is hand-painted." Little DIK: "Pooh! who cares? Our whole fence is."

PHYSICIANS should not be afraid to cross the ocean, because they are used to sea sickness.

"I SEE you are going to introduce a bill for a reform in spelling, Mr. Lawler." "Yes, I think words ought to be spelled as they are they pronounced. Now 'kewpaler,' for instance! How's a fellow going to know how to pronounce it when he sees it spelled 'cupola'?"

JUST SO.—A landlady being asked if she would miss a boarder, who had just died, replied: "Yes, we shall miss him: for notwithstanding his verbosity, which bordered on ponderosity, we forgave his ferocity, as his loquacity never engendered animosity." The above was clipped from a paper by a young lady, who sent it to a gentleman. He, after reading it, immediately penned the following lines: "Miss —:—Not being gifted with verbosity which is inclined to ponderosity, nor with that loquacity which stimulates velocity, nor yet with that superabundance of asperity, which so often characterizes the gentler moiety of the human race, I cannot at present appropriate to myself the transient suggestion embodied in the clipping, which rightly ascribes it to its proper source. I return your amusing article, feeling that you will ever cherish it as a just and spontaneous tribute to the rising capabilities of the weaker sex."

## FLYERS.

Silence may be the effect of grato wisdom, or none at all, but it is safe either way.

If a man claims a good deal, he will get something, and if he claims nothing, he will get that, too.

There is a grate deal of honesty in this world that wants more watching than the devil does.

If a man smokes you real hard on one cheek, you may turn him the other, if you have a mind to—but I won't.

A suspicious man makes more blunders than a credulous one does.

When a thimble-rigger offers to bet me 5 dollars that I can't tell where the little joker lies, I always give it right up.

The philosophers have spent a great deal of valuable time trying to prove that adversity is better than prosperity, but I never heard of their making a convert yet.

The only way to be positively safe is to be humble.

A bravado among men is as harmless in the end as a mad ant among the insects.

If a man cheats me the second time, he ain't half so much to blame for it as I am.

There is no certain rule for a long life, but there is for a good one.

There are a thousand honest ways to get into debt, but only one to get out.

What a difference there is between our follies and other people's—ours are only amiable weaknesses, other people's are criminal.

Listen to all things, but approve but few. Don't be afraid of anything; this world, and everything in it, was made expressly for man's subjection.

There is nothing so painful and ridiculous to me as to see a 3-minute horse, or man, trying to strike a 2-40 gait.

When I was a boy I used to hang around a blacksmith's shop a good deal, and I learnt there not to touch anything that was red-hot.

I notice that those who kiss and kiddle the most in public, pinch and pull hair the most in private.

There is a grate deal of economy that there is no profit in. I have known people to sell a large-sized hen on 2 eggs, just to be saving.

—JOSEPH BILLINGS.



## SOCIETY.

PRINCE ALEXANDER OF BATTENBERG is expected to visit the Queen, and personally thank Her Majesty for the sympathy felt for him in his recent trials (as distinct altogether from State affairs).

SINCE the departure of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught en route to India, nothing unusual has occurred at Balmoral. The Royal party take daily drives in the neighbourhood.

THE new waiting-room that has been made for the use of the Queen and members of the Royal Family at Ballater, is stated to be not only elegant but comfortable. The walls are panelled in polished yellow pine left *au naturel*, and are divided into bays by fluted pilasters of a dark polished wood, carrying a continuous entablature. A panelled dado of a dark tone, to agree with the pilasters and entablature, and broken up by enriched pedestals under the pilasters, is carried round the room at the level of the window sills. The chimney-piece is treated with heavily-moulded jambs, and has a moulded and carved frieze, with bold cornice-shelf over. The centre of the floor is covered with a heavy Persian carpet. The furniture, of wainscot oak, is especially designed in the same style as the room, but with greater richness.

THE Princess of Wales and her daughters, upon arriving at Copenhagen, found several members of the Danish Royal family awaiting them. The Princess and her daughters were looking wonderfully well, and the whole party was remarkably cheerful. The former were neatly dressed in travelling suits.

PRINCE GEORGE OF WALES, who is accompanying the Duke of Edinburgh on his trips, is appreciative, we understand, of his by no means unpleasant lot. Quick at making friends and retaining them, he is already an established favourite at the Mediterranean station, and sure of a hearty welcome wherever he shows his mirthful face. "George Sprat," as the shipmates of his "middy" days used affectionately to call him, bids fair to develop into one of the most courted members of the Royal Family.

THE Duchess of Albany's cheery presence is often—indeed, almost daily—brought to bear upon the party at Balmoral. Her brother has been made very welcome at Birkhall, and also by the Queen at the Castle, and has been initiated into the mysteries of deerstalking and other essentially British sports. The Duchess is full of excursions, and finds her life in the Highlands anything but dull with her children for company.

AT the Dublin Horse Show which took place recently, most of the rank and beauty of the Emerald Isle were present, and the dresses worn by some of the ladies were simply superb. Among them may be mentioned that of Princess Edward of Saxe-Weimar, who wore a costume of brown faille, with flounces of embroidered cream silk, and a brown bonnet.

THE Duchess of Abercorn was in black silk, with a mantelet of velours friés, and a black bonnet with aigrette. Lady Wicklow wore a gown of myrtle-green poplin, with panel and trimmings of gold embroidery; a green and gold bonnet. The Countess of Mayo had a gown of ruby silk, a small mantle of jet and lace, and a red bonnet ornamented with jet.

LADY Florence Bourke wore a grey costume, and a grey hat ornamented with a large buckle. Lady Cloncurry wore a black silk gown, ornamented with lace and jet, and a bonnet to correspond. The Countess of Fingal wore a dress and hat composed of black lace, and a grey jacket. Lady Albert Seymour had a costume and hat of pale sage green, ornamented with velvet of a darker shade.

LADY Eva Wyndham Quin wore a costume of ceru Indian silk, and hat to match. Lady Ardilaun had a soft white woollen costume, with plaid drapery, and a dark grenat velvet hat.

## STATISTICS.

**EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY.**—The total number of cases tried in the County Courts in England in 1885, under the Employers' Liability Act, 1880, was 340. The amount of compensation claimed, £49,466; the sum awarded, £7,856. There were also 166 cases not tried, 34 being struck out, 75 settled, and 57 pending on the 31st December, 1885. In Scotland there were 143 cases, amount claimed, £35,628 16s., awarded, £2,377 10s. In Ireland 57 cases, £6,526 claimed, and £1,116 6s. 10d. awarded.

**ALLOTMENTS.**—The number of agricultural labourers, farm servants, and cottagers given in the Census Returns for 1881 is, for England, 766,712; for Wales, 40,896; and for Scotland, 91,801. There are, in addition, upwards of 84,000 women, more than half of whom are in Scotland, who are returned as labourers, farm servants, and cottagers. There are also 33,000 shepherds. This raises the total working agricultural population to more than a million. Of this million 111,146 have ground for potatoes, 12,593 have a general run for a cow, and 4,709 a definite quantity of land for the same purpose. The number of Allotments or Field Gardens not exceeding four acres in extent is 394,517, of which 134,932 are under an eighth of an acre in extent, 117,706 under a quarter of an acre, and 105,097 under an acre. The number of allotments of an acre and more, up to four acres, is 36,722. In addition to these there are 39,425 railway allotments. The total number of allotments detached from cottages is therefore 433,942. The gardens attached to cottages inhabited by working men are 279,009, of which 6,142 are granted by the railways. The total number of purely agricultural allotments, excluding railway allotments, but including potato grounds and cow runs, is 795,532.

## GEMS.

WE know more about our feelings than about anything else, yet scarcely understand them at all.

UNHAPPY is he who desires to die so long as there remains to him any sacrifice to make, one joy to create, troubles to prevent, tears to dry.

WE look at the one little woman's face we love as we look at the face of our mother earth, and see all sorts of answers to our own yearnings.

TO know the pains of power we must go to those who have it; to know its pleasures we must go to those who are seeking it; the pains of power are real, its pleasures imaginary.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**APPLE MARMALADE.**—Take any kind of sour apples, pare and core them; cut them in small pieces, and to every pound of apples put three-quarters of a pound of sugar; put them in a preserving-pan, and boil them over a slow fire, until they are reduced to a fine pulp; then put in jelly-jars, and keep in a cool place.

**RED CABBAGE.**—Slice it into a colander, and sprinkle each layer with salt. Let it drain ten days, then put it into a jar, and pour boiling vinegar enough to keep it covered. Put in a few slices of red beet-root. Choose the purple-red cabbage. Cauliflower cut in branches, and thrown in after being salted, will become a beautiful red.

**CRAB-APPLES.**—Select perfect ones; pour boiling water over them, which removes the skin; lay them in water enough to cover them; let them simmer slowly until soft; take them out and drain; make a clear syrup, pound; boil them in it till clear, lay them on dishes to cool, and place them in jars; cook the syrup a little longer, and pour it over the apples when hot; seal.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

**PAPER PICTURE FRAMES.**—A considerable industry is now carried on in Europe in the manufacture of picture frames from paper. Paper pulp, glue, linseed oil, and carbonate of lime, or whiting, are mixed together and heated into a thick cream, which, on being allowed to cool, is run into moulds and hardened. The frames are then gilded or bronzed.

**BEAUTIFUL ARTICLES EASILY MADE.**—Very pretty things can be made out of common checked glass cloths by working stars of coloured wool and cotton in each alternate square—blue stars on the blue checks, pink on the pink. The work is really effective and makes up into nightdress cases, brush bags, cabin tidies, toilet covers, bed coverlets or morning aprons. A nightdress case of checked glass cloth, worked with pale blue stars, lined with pale blue sateen, trimmed round with lace and finished off with a pale blue ribbon bow, makes a very pretty present, accompanied by a brush bag to match. The same may be done in pale pink. For a bed coverlet several lengths of glass cloth must be joined and the alternate squares worked over. There should be a lining of pink or blue sateen, and a border of broad, coarse lace or white ball fringe. A morning apron looks pretty in this work, trimmed round with lace and with bows on the pockets. Wool is more effective than ingrain cotton for working the squares, but it should be Andalusian wool or fine Berlin, that will wash well.

**LOVERS OF JEWELLERY.**—All the people in Ceylon, babies and old men included, wear gold and silver ornaments. They even invent new places for carrying them, and it is no uncommon thing to see a Cingalese belle with the top of her ears covered with gold plate or wire, a large pair of rings pendant from the lobes of the ear, a gold or silver circlet round her hair, her nose adorned with rings, and silver plates on her toes. This is the perfection of adornment; but in one or other of the fashions, or in several of them, the Cingalese woman, of whatever station in life, is set forth. I saw running out of a house a sturdy little boy two years of age who had nothing on but a silver key fastened round his waist by a girdle of silver wire. The men take their pleasureless expensively. They delight in gold earrings and rings, but beyond this they are content to intrust the recommendation of their personal appearance to a fine tortoise-shell comb of circular shape, set on the crown of their heads, with the ends toward the forehead.

**EARLY TIME-MEASURING.**—The story is that King Alfred had no better way of measuring time than by burning candles, each of which lasted two hours, and when all the twelve were gone another day had passed. Before the time of Christ the shadow of the sun on a dial told the time. The Chaldeans so placed a hollow hemisphere, with a bead in the centre, that the shadow of the bead on the inner surface told the time. Other kinds of dials were afterwards made with a tablet of wood or a straight piece of metal. On these tablets were marked the hours. This dial could only be used in the daytime, and even then it was worthless when the sun was clouded. In order to measure the night as well as the day, the Greeks and Romans used the clepsydra, which means "the water steals away." A large jar was filled with water, and a hole was made in the bottom through which the water could run. The glass in those days was not transparent. No one could see from the outside how much water had escaped, so there were made, on the outside, certain marks that told the hours as the water ran out; or else a notched stick was dipped in the water, and the depth of what was left showed the hour. Once in a while some very rich man had a clepsydra that sounded a musical note at every hour; then came, in after years, the clock, which struck the hour in various tones.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**ALDA.**—Your height is about the average.

**F. R. D.**—To prevent mudlugs from becoming sour, pour a little oil of cloves into the bottle containing it.

**M. E. H.**—The so-called stamp filtration was given in No. 1028 post free three halfpence in stamps.

**ROSEY.**—To scour zinc, use glycerine mixed with diluted sulphuric acid.

**NELLIE B.**—The Hyde Park railings were broken down in 1886, and the 19th of November in that year came on a Monday.

**VOLUNTEER.**—The tincture of iodine diluted with one-half its bulk of water is a superior liquid for browning gun-barrels.

**CONFIDANT.**—We cannot afford the space. The language of flowers occupies a volume. If you will send us the names of any flowers, we will tell you the sentiment they are presumed to express.

**L. L. I.**—The art of knitting stockings is said to have originated in Scotland in the early part of the sixteenth century. In the times of Elizabeth it was an important industry in England.

**NAMBLEB.**—It certainly would be the safer plan to mention it, as then nothing could be said about it afterwards, but we do not like positively to advise you, not knowing the disposition. Remember that you are not to blame for what was no fault of yours.

**YOUNG MECHANIC.**—Bleed linseed oil will keep polished tools from rusting if it is allowed to dry on them. Common sperm oil will answer for a short period. A coat of copal varnish is sometimes applied to polished tools exposed to the weather.

**B. N. Y.**—To extract salt from land for medicinal purposes, put a tablespoonful of it in a tin cup, and pour on it a pint of boiling water. Then set it aside to get cold. The lard will be found in a cake on the top, and the salt which it contained will remain in the water.

**S. N. H.**—Thomas Moore, the Irish poet, married, in 1811, Miss Bessie Dyke, a young actress. She is spoken of as "an admirable person and true wife"; "the cheerful companion of his youth and the self-sacrificing nurse of his old age." For about three years before his death (1853) Moore was reduced by softening of the brain to a condition of mental incapacity.

**B. N. T.**—Doubtless the sterility of your passion-flower is caused by the absence of any other plant of the same family in the neighbourhood. These plants are increased with the greatest ease from cuttings of the young wood, and they may also be raised from seeds. If the plants are not set in the ground of the green-house, they should have very large pots or boxes, as the roots require a great deal of room.

**J. E. MARTIN.**—To make lemon syrup, scald twelve lemons, in order to extract all the juice. Cut them in half, squeeze them, and throw the skins into a pint of the water in which they were scalded; then squeeze them again into a pint of water and add that to the juice, straining the whole through a sieve, and to each pint allowing two pounds of loaf sugar. Put it into a preserving kettle and boil until the scum rises; then take it off the fire and remove the scum. When cold bottle and put it in a cool place. It will keep a long time.

**E. H. A.**—In Sir Walter Scott's day the word ascertaining was used as he employs it in the sentence you quote; that is, in the sense of assured or made known. Nowadays it is almost wholly used in the sense of to find out or discovered. In Scott's time an author would have written: "It was necessary for the general to ascertain himself of the devotion of his soldiers;" whereas, in our day the general would "ascertain himself" of the devotion of his troops, or "find out" or ascertain whether they were devoted to him or not. The meaning and the use of many words are changed from generation to generation, and before criticising an author's style as to such matters we should ascertain what the usage was in the age in which he wrote.

**T. DEAST.**—People were frequently accused of witchcraft at the time you mention, because they were more successful than their neighbours in all manner of vocations, farming included. Belief in witchcraft was nothing new, but the outbreak of it at that time was very unusual as to its severity and consequences. Witchcraft and magic of all kinds were more generally believed in in ancient times than at any modern period. They were accepted as a matter of course, and laws were enacted for their suppression. According to the Roman civil code, the practice of supernatural arts was a crime. For example, it was a capital offence for any one to increase his rural produce by magical incantations. Fliny narrates a remarkable trial which took place under this law. Cressus, a laborious and skilful husbandman, was charged by his envious neighbours with having crops of such abundance that it was manifest they could be produced by no other means than the power of magic. The sturdy agriculturist met the accusation by bringing into court his implements of husbandry, oxen, horses, servants, and also his daughter, who formed an able assistant; and he assured the judge that these were "the only witchcraft which he had used." This "magic" had the desired effect; the accusers were covered with shame and confusion, while the skilful and industrious old farmer was dismissed with honour from the tribunal. How many similar cases occur in modern times, in which the success that rewards the skilful and industrious is ascribed to "luck," "fortune," or any other cause than the real one!

**TALLY.**—1. Day labour is preferable. 2. No personal knowledge of it.

**F. F. SUCH.**—Pimples are sometimes got rid of by taking occasionally a dose of magnesia.

**JOHNNY.**—1. Leather is preserved by rubbing it over with equal parts of tallow and castor oil. 2. We cannot aid you.

**N. Y. R.**—Bon'el warehouses are buildings in which imported merchandise is stored until the importer withdraws and pays the duties on it. These places, which are owned or conducted by private individuals, are required to be first-class fireproof buildings.

**C. L. M.**—To make orange syrup, pare the oranges and squeeze and strain the juice from the pulp. To one pint of juice allow one pound and three-quarters of loaf sugar. Put the juice and sugar together, and boil and skim it until it is clear. Then strain it through a flannel bag, and let it stand until it becomes cool; then put it into bottles, corking tightly.

**S. N. T.**—1. The modern plough is said to have originated in the Netherlands, whence we have obtained most of our knowledge of field and kitchen gardening. 2. The first steam plough, or plough moved by steam power, was patented by Mr. Heated, M. P., in 1833. The steam ploughs now used have usually three or four shares and mould-boards, so as to turn as many furrows at once, and are drawn by a steam-engine which looks something like a locomotive. The engine may also be used to draw waggon on common roads, and to drive pumps, saws, threshing machines, &c.

## WHAT LOVE IS.

What is love a maiden questions.

Ah! my darling, soon you'll know;  
You are but a freak, young blossom,  
In your garden here below.

Sweet sixteen! what mysteries thicken

In the beyond for you,  
With your charms each day unfolding,  
In life's sunshine and its dew.

By-and-by some youth will single

You from out the glist'ning band,  
By-and-by some heart will reckon  
You the fairest in the land.

Then it may be that your own heart

(If the other heart be true,  
Good and noble) may return it  
And sweet love unfold to you.

Then will life begin in earnest,

Then will sun-shine from above  
Bring you gladness—and you'll never  
Ask the question—What is love?

What is love? A noble river

With its bright waves flowing free;  
What is love? A golden armour,  
Safe-guard bright for you and me.

Something that is pure and spotless

As the plumage of the dove;  
Queenless flame and crown of beauty,  
Little maiden, this is love!

M. K.

**L. S. R.**—Patent leather is made by tacking the skins on to frames and covering them with several coatings of linseed oil and amber, mixed with a little lamp-black, and then varnished several times with a varnish made of linseed oil and Prussian blue, thinned with spirits of turpentine. The leather is scraped and smoothed with pumice-stone, and is then dried in ovens heated as hot as it will bear. The varnish used for making enamelled leather is composed of linseed oil, in which a drier, such as litharge, has been boiled. It is coloured with lamp-black.

**L. D. D.**—The prevailing opinion among naturalists is that all the varieties of dogs, including the wolf and the jackal, are one species, the variations being deemed the result of climate, domestication, and other circumstances. It may seem incomprehensible that an animal so fierce and wild as the wolf should be of the same ancestry with the affectionate and faithful dog; but this is only because we do not in general take a sufficiently large view of the power of nature to produce varieties in her families. Amongst wolves are occasionally produced individuals of a mild character, which we have only to suppose separated from the rest, so as to breed amongst themselves, in order to see how a variety may be established. We have an example of such a wolf described by Cuvier. Brought up like a dog, he became familiar with every person he was in the habit of seeing. "He would follow his master, seemed to suffer from his absence, evinced entire submission, and differed not in manners from the tamest domestic dog. The master, being obliged to travel, made a present of him to the Royal Menagerie at Paris. Here, shut up in his compartment, the animal remained for many weeks without exhibiting the least gaiety, and almost without eating. He gradually, however, recovered; he attached himself to his keeper, and seemed to have forgotten all his past affections, when his master returned after an absence of eighteen months. At the very first word he pronounced, the wolf, who did not see him in the crowd, instantly recognised him, and testified his joy by his motions and his cries. Being set at liberty, he overwhelmed his old friend with caresses, just as the most attached dog would have done after a separation of a few days."

**D. B.**—Time will sometimes remove them. Do not trouble yourself about the colour of your hair.

**E. C. P.**—Speak to your lover about it, and consult with him as to whom you shall invite to the wedding.

**LOTTIE.**—The 28th of May, 1814, fell on Saturday; the 1st of May, 1840, on Thursday, and the 1st of March, 1842, on Tuesday.

**SARAH.**—In order to have the skin of the hands soft and white, one must keep them from exposure to the sun and wind. In some cases nothing whatever will make the skin of a person's hands soft and white.

**A. M. H.**—Lake Pontchartrain, a salt-water lake in the south-east part of Louisiana, United States, was so called in honour of Count Pontchartrain, a minister of Louis XIV. The lake is about twenty feet deep. Its southern shore borders on New Orleans. It is about forty miles long and twenty-four miles wide. Its northern shores are more elevated than the southern, and afford sites for country seats and summer resorts.

**E. M. H.**—Sir Walter Scott was offered the office of poet-laureate of England, but declined it. The following is a list of those who have filled the office: Ben Jonson, William Drayton, John Dryden, Thomas Shadwell, Nahum Tate, Nicholas Rowe, Lawrence Euston, Colley Cibber, William Whitehead, Thomas Warton, Henry James Pye, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson.

**M. C. S.**—Lord Palmerston succeeded Lord Aberdeen as Prime Minister of England in 1855. In 1857 the House of Commons censured his China policy, but the House being dissolved, the new elections were in his favour. The defeat of the "conspiracy to murder bill," introduced with reference to the attempt of Orsini against Napoleon III., in February, 1858, occasioned his retirement, but in 1859 he was again Premier, and held the post until his death in October, 1865.

**G. S. S.**—It is not surprising that you should have doubts of the correctness of the young clergyman's pronunciation of the name when he called it *De-lah*; but the accent on the first syllable; because, from time immemorial, the usual pronunciation of the word by the great majority of people has been *De-lah*. Nevertheless, the young clergyman was right. *De-lah* is the correct pronunciation of the name of Samson's wife, although it is doubtful if some old-fashioned people would recognise her by that name.

**C. H. H.**—The habit of stammering can only be counteracted by the cultivation of a habit of correct speaking, and the latter can only be acquired by studying the processes of speech, the relation of breath to articulate sounds, the positions of the tongue and the other vocal organs in moulding the outward stream of air, and by a patient application of these principles in slow and watchful practice. The lungs constitute a pair of bellows, and the mouth, in all its varying shapes, the nozzle of the bellows. All sounds originate in the throat, and all effort in speech must be thrown back behind the articulating organs, which must be kept passive, yielding to the air, always opening to give it exit, and never resisting it by ascent of the tongue or of the jaw. The head must be held firmly on the neck, to give free play to the attached organs, and the great principle that speech is breath must never be lost sight of; and that, while distinctness depends on precision and sharpness of the vocal actions, fluency depends on the unrestrained emission of the material of speech—the air we breathe.

**MARTHA B.**—Pope says:

"In Pride, in reasoning Pride our error lies;  
All quit their sphere and rush into the skies;  
Pride still is aiming at the bliss of abodes,  
Men would be angels, angels would be gods."

The following, by the Earl of Roscommon, is to the point:

"Pride (of all others the most dangerous fault)  
Proceeds from want of sense or want of thought."

Shakespeare serves up the proud in this way:

"But man, proud man!  
Dressed in a little brief authority;  
Most ignorant of what he's most assured—  
His glassy essence—like an angry ape  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As make the angels weep."

And Coleridge, in referring to Satan's thoughts about the conduct of one of those proud hypocrites who try to make people think they are humble, says:

"And the devil did grin, for his darling sin  
Is the pride that aces humility."

We trust that among these quotations you will find some which will be useful to you.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 292 Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free. Eightpence. Also Vol. XLVI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 354, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 354, Strand, by J. R. BECK: and Printed by WOODFALL and KNEELAND, Milford Lane, Strand.